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MY STORIES

Highlights of my Life

BY

Norbert Strauss



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THIS BOOKLET DEDICATED TO THE LOVING MEMORY OF
OUR DEAR SON

BENJAMIN M. STRAUSS

WHO WAS TAKEN FROM US BY THE WILL OF HASHEM
DURING THE 50TH YEAR OF HIS LIFE

*HASHEM NOSAN - V'HASHEM LOKOCH
Y'HEE SHAME HASHEM M'VOROCH*

G-D HAS GIVEN - AND G-D HAS TAKEN AWAY
BLESSED BE THE NAME OF G-D

Job 1:21

Hermie and Norbie
1930/31

With PB
1960s

Packing Clothing
for D.P.'s, 1948

Hermie and Norbie
1928/29

My Class in Bad Homburg, 1933/34
(White shirt and tie)

Frankfurt
About 1937 (?)

Trude in
Providence, 1947

Pioneer Country Club
about 1950

Korea
1946

College Graduation
1949



**Wedding Day
1951**

**Honeymoon
Florida,1951**

About 1995

Two Camels

**Ari's Wedding
1995**

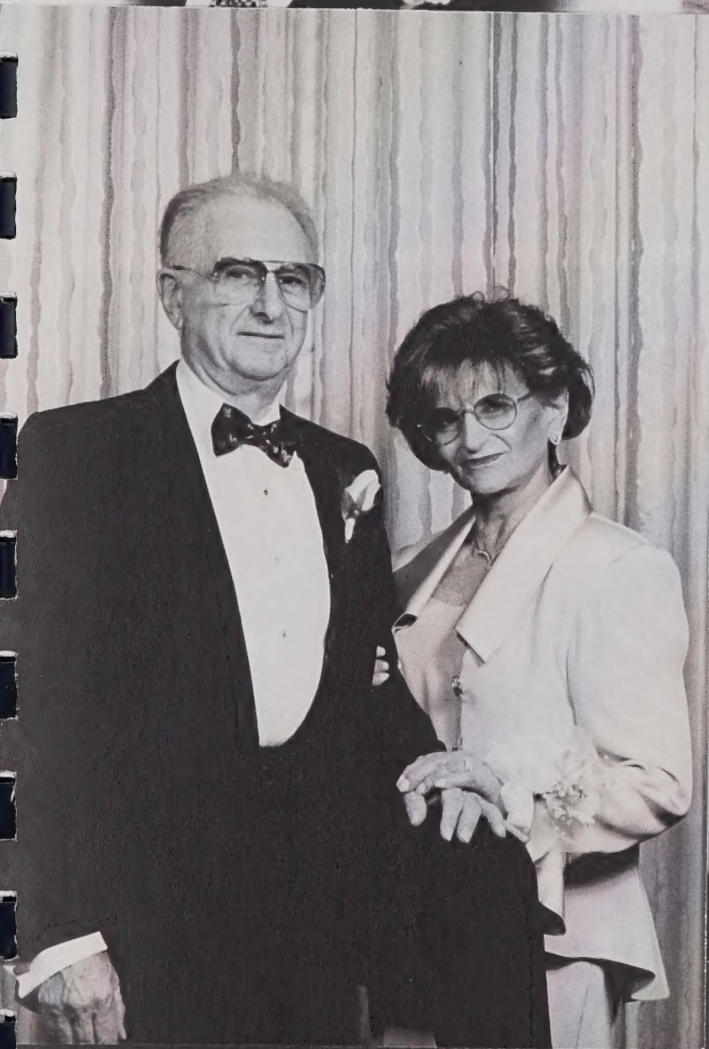
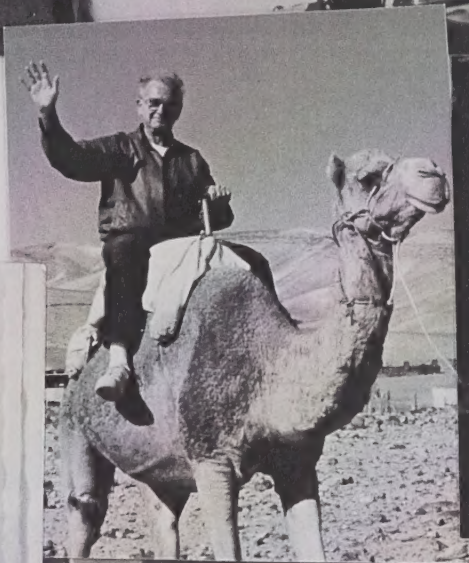
**On a Cruise
S/S Nili 1966**

**Wedding Day
1951**

**Guest of Honor at
Shaare Zedek Hospital
New York 1972**

**Ari's Bar Mitzvah
1987**

**Ramat Golan
Israel, 1982**





**My Parents, Brother,
and Children**



**My Children and
Grandchildren**



**My Great
Grandchildren**

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FOREWORD

I seem to be having more difficulty getting started on the Foreword than I had telling my stories. Maybe that is because I have told some of the main parts so many times that I do not have to think at all when hitting the keys. But now I realize that writing something down is more risky than just telling it. You tell the story and then walk away from it. Little of the detail is ever remembered by the listener and the questions asked of me when I am finished are usually of a general nature. For example, after having finished telling my Holocaust story to a group of about 60 eighth graders, mostly of Asian origin, one fellow raised his hand and wanted to know what that little cap on the back of my head meant.

Therefore, I never had to worry about contradicting myself, or making a factual error. Nobody would know any differently. But now, if committed to paper, no doubt, sooner or later, someone will say to me that something does not make sense or contradicts what I have stated somewhere else. To try to avoid this as much as possible, I am giving out first drafts to Esther and my grandson Gil to be my editors. Hopefully, most of the mistakes, as well as grammatical or structural errors will be caught by those who know English much better than I ever will.

My special thanks go to some of my grandchildren who, some months ago, urged me to commit to writing all the little (or in some cases not so little) stories that I have been telling to one or another, with no one ever hearing it all. Also, my daughter Esther complained that many times when I told a story at the table, she was in the kitchen between courses and consequently she probably has heard less than anyone else.

Finally I gave in, although I hate to write. Purchasing my first laptop a few months ago, helped in the decision, since the spell check makes me so smart. Most of the details come from memory, but when specific months are mentioned, the information was taken from my files. Other specific sources are indicated in the appropriate places by footnotes.

My special thanks go to my eldest grandson, Ari (Rabbi Ari Perl) for pushing me into the initiative and spending quite some time with me taking notes, which he was then later going to have transcribed into the story. Subsequently, I decided that not only would this method be too much of a burden on him and his secretary, but it also would delay the completion considerably. I felt that if I was going to undertake the project, now was the time to commence and to complete it expeditiously. We have only too recently seen how the hand of Hashem (The Almighty) can strike quickly and without warning.

Therefore, I decided to sit down, and with the help of my laptop, to search the recesses of my mind while I still have the ability to do so, and commit everything to paper (keyboard?). With the critical help of my family I hope the product will not be too embarrassing.

The Reader will no doubt, in some instances feel that I am blowing my own horn too loudly. Well, yes I do, and I apologize for it. Unfortunately, few readers will have known me, or about me, when I was a child and a teenager. Therefore the Reader will not have the facility to judge the tremendous change that occurred in me, or to me, between the age of 18 and 21. Boy Norbie went into the army, and a young man by the name of Norbert immersed from the army. I am not ashamed of what I was, but I am proud of what I accomplished thereafter.

Just look at my family. With the help of Hashem, as well as Trude, who has stood by my side, the family has grown around us, and everyone can be justifiably proud of it.

But my story would not be a story to tell, were it not for my parents, Josef and Bertha Strauss, or Opa and Oma, as the family always called them, and as they are called in these stories.

Opa until 1993, when he was taken from us at the ripe old age of 97, had been the head of the family for 75 years. He had made himself successful by starting a business from scratch, while he was still a very young man, and had guided his family through darkening clouds in the 1930s and '40s, during the rise of Hitler, *y'mach sh'moh* (cursed be his name), and through the economic hardships of establishing a new life in the US. Never did he flinch from his responsibilities to his family and the community, and never did he waver or concede an inch while upholding his firm belief in Hashem and the Torah.

When Opa retired from his business that he had re-established in the US, he switched his occupation to assisting charities. The local Yeshiva Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Gemiluth Chesed of Greater New York, and finally Palisades Garden for Senior Citizens, where he and Oma would spend their later years, were all beneficiaries of his hours of toil and wisdom.

There probably is not, and never was, a person in the world more honest than Opa. I had my first lesson from him on that subject while working in his warehouse, and also while helping him send financial settlements to his suppliers. One little story, that I remember Opa telling, illustrates this.

Opa, in World War I, was with the German Artillery on the French front. Something that might be difficult to imagine in today's day and age, soldiers were paid in cash at whatever station they happened to be at any given time. The cash was kept in a horse drawn wagon, with a "Zahlmeister" (paymaster) in charge and it traveled with the unit wherever it went. At the end of the war, in 1918, the Zahlmeister received instructions to return the left-over money to a specified place in Berlin. For reasons that are not relevant to the story, the Zahlmeister of Opa's unit decided he did not want to go to Berlin, and appointed Opa to take the horse and wagon with the cash, and go in his stead. Opa, as always, followed orders and when he came to the destination in Berlin and tried to deliver the cash, he was received with, "Strauss, sind Sie verrueckt?" (Strauss, are you crazy?) Nobody could understand the honesty of that soldier, driving hundreds of miles to Berlin to deliver cash, when he could just as easily have driven home with it. In the confusion after the end of the war, nobody would have known and nobody would have questioned it. It obviously never entered Opa's mind to be dishonest.

Oma, who left us in 1990 at the age of 89, showed superhuman strength during the Holocaust years in Germany, from 1938 to 1941, when she had sole responsibility for guiding the family, and making all decisions with Opa thousands of miles away, already in the US. And when it came to the most difficult and dangerous final decision in late 1940, Oma was able to rescue her

children and herself and unite everyone again in New York.

Throughout her years in New York, Oma shared with Opa the responsibility, respect and love of the extended family. Everyone was welcome in her house at all times, including some of my cousins, who had no family of their own.

The worst tragedy struck our family just a little over half a year prior to my writing this, with the loss of our son, Benjamin, at the young age of 50, leaving his wonderful wife Claire and four brilliant children, ages 18 to 22.

Benjy, as he was known to our family, or Ben, as he was known in his office, not only was the best husband and father, but I cannot imagine anyone ever being able to be a better son to us and grandson to Opa and Oma. His immediate family was very important to him, but he also cared about, and remained in contact with, others in the family who needed his help and consideration.

He was deeply involved with the Synagogue that he attended, but he always remained in the background, never willing to accept any official position, though they were offered to him many times. He and Claire were the founders of Tomchei Shabbos of Bergen County, an organization that supplies weekly food packages to over 100 needy families in the area. He worked for that organization literally until a few hours before he was rushed to the hospital. Many other organizations were the beneficiaries of his generosity and wisdom as well.

Benjy was a great public speaker and speech writer, for himself as well as for others. He was at his best when asked to speak at functions honoring someone else, since he never accepted any honors for himself.

When, in the early 1980s, I was honored by a local institution, Benjy spoke to several hundred guests about me, concluding with, "Tonight, we give you no Plaques, no Awards, no Gifts. Instead, we give you our boundless respect, admiration, and support - and most importantly, our love."

That was our Benjy. We will always miss him - but he will always be with us.

And last, but certainly not least, my thanks go to Trude, who has stood by me through thick and thin, in good times and bad times, during joyous moments, as well as difficulties. Her love of her family has been the glue that maintained stability even when it seemed that problems would overwhelm us. When I worked long hours, either for Philipp Brothers or for charities, or when I was gone for days on end on a business trip, she was there with open arms when I returned.

It is now over 53 years that we have been married, but it does not seem that long at all. Quoting the words of the Torah, when Jacob had to serve seven years before he could marry his beloved Rachel, ".....and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had onto her."

May the Reader have less difficulty reading "My Stories", than I had writing it.

NORBERT STRAUSS
Englewood N.J.
December 2004 / Tevet 5765

THE STRAUSS FAMILY¹

Jacob Herz, born in 1780 in Rod am Berg in the Taunus mountains, Germany and sometime before 1805 married Rachel Michel. They had four children- Abraham, Michael, Meier and Alexander, born between 1805 and 1815. All subsequent generations mentioned below lived originally in Rod am Berg and subsequently in Schmitten, another village nearby.

In 1841 the entire family, parents, children, and grandchildren, changed their name from Herz to Strauss. Records do not disclose any reason for the change of name.

Meier Strauss married Rebekka Maas (Wolf ?) in 1851. They had three children Herman, Wilhelm and Rosa, born between 1853 and 1856.

Herman married Jettchen Rosenberg in 1880 and had 6 children - Bertha, Josef, Wilhelm, Rosa, Frieda, and Recha.

Bertha married Josef Herz, who as a German soldier was killed in World War I, and they had a son, Benno who moved to New York. Bertha died in Frankfurt in 1940. Wilhelm married Johanna Waller and had two children - Max was born in 1924 and Lillie was born in 1932. Lillie was killed in a tragic accident in 1936. In 1937 Wilhelm and Johanna had another child, Heinz. The whole family was killed in the Holocaust in 1943 in a concentration camp in Poland.

Rosa married Karl Kohlhagen and they had a son, Walter. Walter came to New York but his parents were killed in Poland by the Nazis in 1943.

Frieda married Jonas Halberstadt and they had a son, Leo and a daughter, Bessy. Bessy lives in England and Leo lives in New York. Their parents were killed in Poland in 1943.

Recha married Willie Halberstadt (brother of Jonas) and their children Hannie and Alex both are married, and live in England.

Josef, born 1896 in Schmitten im Taunus, married Bertha Nathan, born 1901 in Hamburg, in 1924, and they established residence in Bad Homburg vor der Hoehe. Their two sons, Herman and Norbert, were born in 1926 and 1927 respectively.

¹ This history is extracted from the Strauss family tree, based on documented evidence received from a hired investigator, who studied the archives maintained by the Church authorities on behalf of all religions. Official civil records were started only in 1818, with the responsibility to record the data, given to that religion which was predominant in a particular village. Thus the records for those born in Schmitten were kept by the Catholic church headquarters in Limburg, and those born in the neighboring village of Rod am Berg were kept by the Protestant church headquarters in Anspach. All these towns and villages are located in the Taunus Mountains.

THE NATHAN FAMILY

Bertha (Oma) came from a well-known family in Hamburg. Her father was known as “Graveur Nathan” since he had a business of engraving metal signs, letter seals (signets), stone and copper engravings, etc. Bertha’s siblings were Joel, Julius, Roeschen, Ida (Judith), Rachel and Paul. All, except Rachel, survived the Holocaust by emigrating early. Rachel was killed in a concentration camp in Poland, probably in 1943, together with her daughter, Naomi. Her husband Alex survived.

Joel’s daughter, Ruth, lives in New York. Judith’s daughter, Rachel, lives in Israel. (Another daughter, Maya, died in Israel a few years ago). Paul’s daughter, Muriel, lives in New York. Roeschen’s son, Mario, lives in Israel. Julius’ son, Harold, and daughter, Vera, died a few years ago.

Bertha’s father was Hymann Hirsch Nathan, born in 1843 in Hamburg, and her mother, Hymann’s second wife, was Minna nee Mansbach, born about 1871 and died in Israel (then Palestine) in 1940. The Nathan family tree has been traced back to Nathan Moses who died in 1675. It is not quite clear how the name Nathan evolved, since over the seven generations between my grandfather, Hymann, and Nathan Moses, the name Nathan appears as a first name, middle name and then finally, as the last name. The seventh generation was Aberle Nathan who moved from Hamburg to London and seemingly adopted London as his last name. London remained the last name through four generation, and it was changed back to Nathan in the third generation.

Fifth generation Nathan London, who died in 1775, married Hanna Chalasch Halberstadt, from one of the oldest and most famous families in Hamburg. It is interesting to note the name Halberstadt, since two of Opa’s sisters married two Halberstadt brothers. My cousin, Alex Halberstadt, living in London, told me, that he is aware of the Hamburg Halberstadt family, but, since he is a Kohen (Priest), and they are not, there can be no relationship. The Halberstadt family tree, through Hanna’s daughter- in- law Mate Spanier, has been traced back to Moses Spanier, who was born about 1550 and died about 1617. It is suspected that, at some point during the Spanish Inquisition (1492), the family migrated to Germany from Spain, hence the family name, Spanier, which means Spaniard in German.

Aberle Nathan London, is the ancestor of the family who founded the “Graveur Nathan” business which became engravers to the Court. Detailed information about him can be found in two works: Maase Rav by Jochanan Pintschower, printed in Amsterdam in 1707, and in Megillas Sefer by Jacob Emden. He was the chairman of the German-Jewish Gemeinde (Community), and was greatly respected, not only because of his wealth from a jewelry business that he owned in London, but also because of his learning. He held the honorary title, “Mehuror”.

Nathan London is generally known as the founder of the engraving business. Since his son, Issac Nathan London, died at an early age in 1785 shortly after his marriage, the business eventually passed to Joel Nathan born in 1767 and died in 1859. Joel was an engraver and became an artist in his field. His son, Nathan Joel Nathan, born in 1803 and died in 1875, continued the business and subsequently turned it over to his son, Hymann Hirsch Nathan, my grandfather.

Although I have been unsuccessful at finding any personal information or history about my grandfather, Hymann, there is a story told by my cousin, Ruth, as it was told to her by her father Joel, that depicts him as an extremely orthodox Jew. In fact, as the story goes, when his brothers, with whom he was partners in a thriving engraving business in Berlin, decided to keep their business open on Shabbos, he walked out. He moved his family to Hamburg where he was so destitute initially, that he had to be supported by the Jewish community.

STRAUSS / NATHAN MEET

Our grandfather, Herman Strauss, had a well-known hotel and restaurant in Schmitten that was very popular with orthodox Jews in Germany for summer vacations. That is where our parents Josef and Bertha met one year, fell in love and got married.

Our father (Opa), as a teenager, had been apprenticed to a hides and skins business in the neighborhood of Schmitten. Therefore, when they were married in 1924, they moved to Bad Homburg (v.d.H.), and at the same time Opa established his own wholesale hides and skins business in the village of Dornholzhausen, near Homburg. The business consisted of the purchase of hides (cow, bull, horse) and skins (calf, sheep, goat) from butchers, wholesalers and slaughter houses, cleaning and trimming them with knives, processing them and by soaking in a salt brine in preparation for eventual sale to tanneries.

Herman was born there in 1926, and I in 1927.

HERMAN AND NORBERT'S SCHOOL YEARS

Herman entered the local public school in 1932, and I in 1933. Although there was an active Jewish community of several hundred families and a large synagogue, there was no Jewish School. In addition we attended afternoon or evening classes arranged by the Jewish community. The synagogue was an active institution which we attended every Sabbath and Jewish holiday.

Our school years, until 1935, were distinguished only by the fact that both of our teachers already belonged to the Nazi storm troopers (Brown Shirts). Particularly my teacher felt it necessary to demonstrate his hate for the Jews with almost daily punishments and beatings.

By 1935, our parents decided that the situation had deteriorated to a point that a change had to be made. We were taken out of the local school and for one year we traveled to Frankfurt am Main by streetcar every day. It was a trip of over an hour each way. Since so much time was taken up by our travel, and probably also because anti-Semitism was getting worse in Homburg and

Dornholzhausen, our family moved to Frankfurt in 1936. Opa also moved his business from Dornholzhausen to Frankfurt.

In Frankfurt, we now attended the Israelitische Volksschule which was the 4 year grade school of the Orthodox Frankfurt community. The continuation, thereafter, was the Hirsch Realschule (high school) which Herman entered in 1936, and I in 1937. Both schools taught a combination of Jewish and secular subjects.

KRISTALLNACHT NOVEMBER 1938

After the death of our grandfather Herman in 1925, the running of the hotel and restaurant in Schmitten had been taken over by Opa's brother, Wilhelm. Already in the mid -thirties, anti-Semitism had gotten so bad in Schmitten, that the family had to move from Schmitten to Frankfurt where Uncle Wilhelm opened a kosher restaurant on the Zeil (name of main commercial street). Their living quarters were right behind the restaurant and connected to it. On Kristallnacht, the restaurant and the apartment were broken into and everything was smashed to pieces to such an extent that the family had to move out immediately. The family of four came to live with us in our apartment, which, being in a quiet residential area, had not touched by the Nazis.

That night while everybody was sleeping in this temporary arrangement, there came a loud crash. Several policemen and Storm Troopers were kicking at the door to wake everybody up. They ordered all men above the age of 16 to come with them. Our cousin Max, Herman and I were under 16; therefore only uncle Wilhelm and Opa quickly got dressed and left.

The next morning, not having heard anything further, we nevertheless left for school. We always went to school by bicycle to avoid being caught and beaten by the Hitler Youth. We got as far as the Uhr-Tuermchen (a well known landmark), where we stopped because of what we saw in front of us. A block away we saw the synagogue, known generally by its location, Friedberger Anlage, engulfed in flames. The fire department trucks were standing there only to make sure that no neighboring buildings would caught fire. We stood there, not knowing what the situation with our school was, when a man came over to us and told us that we had better go home.

We subsequently found out that all the synagogues, except one, were burned to the ground that day, including the Boerneplatz Synagogue, which our family had always attended. The school buildings, although not burned, were closed by the authorities.

When we got home and reported what we had seen, everybody realized what was going on and that most likely uncle Wilhelm and Opa would not be returning that day or any time soon. It had become known in the meantime that all the arrested men (and there were thousands of them) were being held in the Festhalle, a very large building used for exhibitions and the like. Oma decided that since the men had neither been able to take their coats nor any food, that she would take a taxi, to take coats and food to them. Oma asked me to come along. When we arrived there, we saw a huge crowd of screaming Nazis in the area in front of the building. When they saw us

getting out of the taxi, they started throwing stones and screaming anti-Semitic curses and slogans. Fortunately, the driver had waited and urged us to get back in, which we did, and drove home without having accomplished our mission.

OPA'S RESCUE²

After a few days, all the men in the Festhalle were transported to the Buchenwald concentration camp.

Subsequently, it became known that there were several avenues to get release of specific men from Buchenwald. One such way was to prove that the individual had been a front-line soldier in the First World War and to guarantee emigration within 6 months. Oma took Opa's World War I records and decorations to the police, and upon the purchase of a Cuban landing pass, was able to obtain Opa's release.

Opa returned home just four weeks after having been arrested. He settled his affairs, including selling his business, and on May 13th 1939 he departed from Hamburg on the ship, "St. Louis." Oma and the boys stayed in Frankfurt since the landing pass into Cuba was only available to Opa and not the family.

The vessel got to Cuba on May 27th only to find out that the Cuban government had changed its mind, and would only allow those passengers to debark, who already had family in Cuba. These were only about 30 or 40 people out of about 800 Jews onboard.

The ship stayed in the Havana harbor while Jewish organizations, as well as the shipping agency, tried to negotiate with the Cuban government. It was all to no avail and, in fact, the authorities ordered the vessel to leave the harbor on June 2nd. While talks were still going on, the refugees onboard tried to remain hopeful. The vessel steamed up and down the Florida coast between June 3rd and June 6th, so near to the coast, that the passengers, with longing, looked at the lights of Miami Beach as they passed by. The American government also did not relent and did not allow anyone in.

Finally, when the captain of the St. Louis realized that he was running out of food, he requested instructions from his head office and was told to return to Germany immediately. Upon hearing this announcement on June 6th, the passengers were gripped by despair and fear, knowing quite well that a return to Germany would mean immediate transport to a concentration camp. A number of suicides were reported at that point.

A word at this point about the Captain of the St. Louis. Although the ship and the crew were German, and although it was known that several members of the crew and officers were Nazis

² All dates in connection with the voyage of the St. Louis are taken from the book Voyage of the Damned, (which also was the title of the movie made in Hollywood) published in 1947

and were filing reports with the Gestapo, the Captain was always a gentleman, treating the passengers with respect and consideration. It is known that he was threatened by the crew members and officers for treating the Jews so humanely, but he persisted until the end. In consideration for his wonderful behavior, he was subsequently declared by Israel as a "Righteous Gentile" and a tree was planted in his honor and memory at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem.

Furious activity commenced in the world's capitals and in Jewish international organizations, when it became known that the vessel was on its way back to Germany. Just a few days before the vessel was to arrive in Bremen, the Dutch, Belgian, French and British governments decided to each take a percentage of the passengers, so that none had to return to Germany. The announcement was made to loud cheers on June 13, 1939.

All passengers were taken off in Antwerp on June 17th. Opa had been assigned to the group going to Holland, and on June 18th he was transported on a small vessel the "Jan van Arckel" with 180 other refugees, from Antwerp to Rotterdam. All were taken to a quarantine station, Heijplaat, where many other German refugees were already being held, awaiting transfer to some other destination. Most would remain there for weeks and only a few would ultimately survive.

Opa wrote pages and pages of letters to us in Frankfurt from on board the ship and from the camp, all of which were saved by Oma and brought to the US. We have donated those letters to the Museum of Jewish Heritage in lower Manhattan.

A MIRACLE FROM HEAVEN

Immediately upon arrival in Heijplaat, Opa notified the American Consulate in De Hague of his location, and that he was awaiting his visa to the US.

The US had an immigration quota under which only a certain number of refugees from each country, were able to obtain visas to the US. The US started issuing quota numbers sometime in the 1930's. Since the obtaining of a visa was dependent on your quota number, the earlier you obtained a number, the sooner you would obtain your visa. Our family had a quota number in the 16,000's. At the time when Opa was in Holland, visas were being given to families from Germany who had numbers 8000-9000 and at the rate of 2000-3000 each year; in other words, Opa would have a long wait.

Opa was notified by the Consulate, that even when his quota number would come up, he would not get a visa since his affidavit papers were insufficient and he was urged to contact the affidavit issuers to obtain improvements. Opa immediately wrote to his relatives in New York, but before he could even get a reply, he received a postcard from the US Consul saying, "Mr. Strauss, come and pick up your visa".

Opa went to De Hague, certain that they would catch their error and that he would return empty

handed. But instead, he did indeed receive his visa and, upon return to the camp, his friends there asked him whom he had bribed. Opa assured everyone that he neither knew anyone there, nor did he have any money with which to bribe anyone.

Many years later, when we discussed this occurrence, Opa still had no explanation as to how or why it happened. He said only that G-d wanted his family to live so that they would be able to help others, and therefore He caused this miracle to happen.

Opa left Rotterdam in the late summer 1939, on the S/S Staatendam, bound for New York, where he was received by our relatives.

LIFE IN FRANKFURT 1938-1941

Life, which up until the Kristallnacht, had been difficult for Jews, but bearable, became increasingly unbearable thereafter.

Jews, not of German origin, mostly from Eastern Europe, were rounded up already in 1939 and deported to concentration camps, mostly in Poland. The rest of us knew it was just a matter of time before our turn would come. All Jewish families had to report to the Gestapo weekly so that when the time came for deportation, they would know where everyone lived.

Food became increasingly difficult to obtain and, whatever there was, often was of such poor quality that it was not edible. Purchases could be made only in specifically designated stores. Others had signs "Juden Unerwünscht" (Jews not wanted). Coal for heating and cooking was no longer being delivered to Jews and had to be picked up at the coal yard. I remember many times, going with my uncles (we were now four families living in one apartment) and cousins to the coal yard during a freezing winter, using a rented pushcart and borrowed burlap bags, to pick up coal.

Walking on the street was always accompanied by the danger of being attacked by gangs of Hitler Youth. Consequently, whenever possible, we used our bicycles, except naturally on Saturday, when we had no choice but to walk.

One bitter cold day, when the streets were covered with deep snow, the city did not want to use its street cleaning crew to remove the snow from streets where mostly Jews lived. All Jewish males, including boys, were ordered out of their houses, told to bring their own shovels and brooms etc., to clean away the snow. Since boys were not excluded, Oma hesitantly let us go out, as well, and work. After a while, when Oma saw from the window that there was very little supervision, she called us in quietly, and told us to stay away from the windows.

The two large synagogues mentioned previously that had been burned to the ground, had moved their services to another building on Hermes Weg, which already had services on the ground floor. As a result, with services on the ground floor as well as on the first and second floors, the building was packed to a dangerous level on Saturdays and Holidays.

One night, a few weeks after Kristallnacht, when the ground where the two main synagogues had

stood had been leveled and only rubble remained, I took my bicycle and drove secretly to each of the two locations and picked up a little stone from each. I am not aware of whether at that point I knew why I was doing it, or even realized the danger I was in, had I been caught. Nonetheless I took the two little stones home, placed them into an AGFA film container, and there they remained until a few years ago, when I donated them to the Museum of Jewish Heritage.

I became a Bar Mitzvah in Frankfurt in March, 1940, while Opa was already in the US. My presents included a hand-painted bookmark made by my Hebrew teacher, who perished in the Holocaust with his whole family. Another present was a plastic cover for my passport. This was typical, since no one had money to spare for gifts. For our “lavish” Bar Mitzvah dinner, we had two chickens which Opa had been able to order from Holland, shared by ten men.

In 1940, the British started bombing the industrial zones across the river from Frankfurt. Although Frankfurt itself was never targeted, in those days bombing was not as precise as it is now, and stray bombs would fall once in a while on residential areas. Consequently, each house had a bomb shelter into which all residents had to go whenever the air raid sirens went off. All together we were in 72 air raids, always at night, during that year.

I had an uncle, Issy Halberstadt, who, prior to the Nazi era, had a good business as an upholsterer and decorator. By 1938, after Krystallnacht, not many people felt like fixing up or repairing anything and consequently his business suffered. Once the war started, even before the air raids began, everyone was ordered to install black paper shades on all windows to effectively black out the city and to prevent the lights from guiding bombers to their destination. That gave Issy an opportunity to make a living again. He was busy from morning until night installing blackout shades in Jewish homes throughout the neighborhood. Non-Jews were not permitted to give work to a Jewish business, and were not permitted to work for a Jew. I became Issy’s apprentice during any free time I had, first helping to cut the paper and rope into proper lengths, and then later doing complete installations, but under his supervision. Since anyone not having blackout shades could not use lights in that room, Issy was under pressure to accept more and more orders. Eventually he allowed me to do complete installations even in his absence. He would deliver the material in his car and would go on to another job while I did the installation. I was at that time 13 years old and could hardly reach the top of the window, even when standing on a ladder. That was my first paid job, and I got paid (I don’t remember how much) for each window completed.

WAITING FOR OUR VISAS

As soon as Opa had received his visa to the US in late summer, 1939, Oma expected that we would receive ours soon thereafter, since, after all, we had the same quota number. Consequently, Oma immediately booked ship passage for the three of us, out of Bremen to New York.

But it was not to be, since in September 1939 war was declared and the port of Bremen was closed to all passenger traffic. Promptly Oma booked passage on a ship out of Genoa, but it was not long thereafter that Italy joined Germany and Genoa was closed to passenger traffic as well.

In August, 1939, Germany and Russia had signed a secret friendship pact, the purpose of which was to divide Poland between them. In early September, Germany invaded Poland from the west and about two weeks later, Russia invaded Poland from the east. This friendship pact made it then possible to travel on the Trans-Siberian Railroad from Germany. Since now German and Italian ports were closed, Oma booked space on the railroad in August 1940, for travel through Koenigsberg, through the Soviet Union to Japan, and then by ship from Yokohama to San Francisco and then by train to New York. My German passport, which I also donated to the Museum of Jewish Heritage, has the necessary transit visas in it.

But we still did not have our American visa.

It later became known that the isolationist US State Department had given instructions to all US consulates to slow down the issuance of visas in order to reduce immigration.

When, eventually, Germany invaded Russia in 1940, that avenue was closed as well.

After the invasion and occupation of France, the only way out of Germany for visa holders was by a train, which the Germans allowed to go through Vichy France into Spain, from where Jewish relief organizations would redirect the refugees to their final destinations. The only problem was that the train was already booked for the next six months. Everybody had a pretty good idea that in six months there would be no Jews left in Frankfurt; that all would be in concentration camps by then. This assumption eventually turned out to be correct, since the last known transport from Frankfurt to the east was in June/July 1941.

THE BRIBE

As I mentioned above all Jewish families had to report to the Gestapo every week to identify their location.

One week, in 1940, when Oma was at the Gestapo, the officer there told her that, if she had any money left, she could bribe “somebody” and obtain plane tickets to fly out of Germany. Oma thanked the officer without giving a reply and returned home. Our family and relatives discussed the pros and cons of doing what the officer had proposed. If it was a trap, we, or at least Oma, would find ourselves jailed for trying to bribe a German officer and be sent to a concentration camp immediately. If, on the other hand, it was not a trap, it could be the only remaining way to get out. Since everyone realized that if we did not leave now, sooner or later we would end up in a concentration camp, we really had little to lose by giving the officer the money.

The following week, Oma took the money, realizing full well that she might never return, went to the Gestapo, and gave the officer the money. He only said that he would have the tickets for her by the next week. Indeed, that is what happened and Oma came home the following week with Lufthansa tickets to fly out of Muenchen in mid-January, 1941.

While all this was going on, we had finally been summoned to the US Consulate in Stuttgart and had received our US visa on November 22, 1940.

LEAVING GERMANY

We packed our few suitcases with whatever personal belongings we were allowed to take with us, and said goodbye to uncles, aunts and cousins, all of whom we would never see again. Some wooden boxes with household goods, and the like (including my stamp collection) had already been shipped to Portugal earlier, to await our arrival and to be loaded onto whatever vessel we would board. These boxes never made it to the US, since we did not have the money to pay the warehouse storage and transportation charges incurred in Portugal.

We took the train to Muenchen on January 6th, 1941, only to arrive in Muenchen to find the airport closed due to 3-4 feet of snow. We stood on the train platform, not knowing which way to turn. We could not go back to Frankfurt, and as Jews we could not go to a hotel overnight. We could not even go into a restaurant to get something to eat. As we stood there, a uniformed railroad employee came over to us and asked what our problem was. After explaining (and there was always the possibility of his calling the police and having us arrested since we had no authority to be there) he told us that all planes that were supposed to leave from Muenchen were leaving from Stuttgart, instead. When Oma told the official that we had no money for the train, he told us what platform the train was leaving from, and that we should just get on board and not ask any questions.

That is what we did and we got to the Stuttgart airport without any further problems, although we were terribly hungry, thirsty and tired. We boarded a four-motored Lufthansa plane, finding three or four other Jewish families there, as well. The other passengers consisted mostly of uniformed officers of the various military branches, as well as civilians who worked for the German spy network, whose headquarters were in Madrid.

If we Jewish families could have found a hole in the ground into which to crawl, that is what we would have liked to do. But nobody bothered us, nobody looked at us, and nobody talked to us. The first stop was Lyon, France where food was brought onboard. But we were not allowed to eat the cooked food only ice cold fruit which made me very airsick. Next stop was Barcelona, Spain where we arrived in a snowstorm on January 8th. The Jewish relief organization HIAS picked us up at the airport, took us into town, brought us our first hot meal in days, and put us up in a hotel for the night.

The next morning, we were taken back to the airport, and on a two-motored Lufthansa plane, flew to Madrid, which was supposed to be a lunch stop at the airport restaurant. Again, we would not eat anything except for boiled rice which Oma considered to be safe enough to eat. Then back on the plane, we traveled to Lisbon, where Oma had distant relatives who put us up for ten days until we could board a ship to New York.

On January 17th we boarded the S/S Siboney, with destination New York.

Since Britain and Germany were at war, there was always the danger of floating mines, or German submarine attacks, despite the fact that the vessel flew the US flag.

I was seasick from the time we left the Lisbon harbor almost until arrival in New York about ten days later. We did not have a private cabin, but a large room, separate for men and women, on double tier bunks beds. In the same room was a group of Afro-American musicians, who had been on a tour in Europe. The one who had his bed on top of mine, tried to help me overcome my seasickness with his family remedy - corn on the cob. I did not know what it was, having never seen corn on the cob before in Germany. In fact, as I found out later, in Germany it was not food for human consumption. It was fed only to the pigs. Opa, even after many years in the US, would not go near corn on the cob. In any event, it did not help, nor did any of the other suggestions from fellow travelers. I just had a very miserable time, whether in bed or on deck. That was my first experience with motion sickness, which later would be repeated on other similar occasions.

A NEW BEGINNING

The S/S Siboney arrived in Hoboken, N.J., on about January 27, 1941, where we were received on the pier by Opa and others from the families of Oma's siblings who lived in the area. So much had transpired since Opa had left Germany about 20 months earlier, to both Opa and us. Being alive and seeing Opa again, while at the same time absorbing the first sights of our new home, must have been overwhelming. I do not remember much of the day except for my first impression, when getting off the ship, when I saw the long line of waiting taxis. All cars in the US were yellow. I do remember our first meal in New York in the home of Oma's younger brother Paul at 717 W 177th Street in Washington Heights. Neither Herman nor I knew what to do with the knife when it came to the meat dish.

We were put up in Washington Heights, in upper Manhattan, because not only was that the destination for most Jewish refugees from Germany but more so because that was where uncle Paul lived and with whom Opa and Oma stayed initially. The boys were put up with friends in the neighborhood. After a short while we moved to our own apartment on 609 W 177th Street.

The early years were economically a very difficult time for the Strauss family. The few wooden crates of personal belongings that we had been permitted to ship out of Germany to Lisbon, never made it on board the S/S Siboney. The crates had been stored in a warehouse in Lisbon awaiting our departure from there. When the time came to have them loaded we did not have the money to pay the warehouse and transportation charges. Eventually, the contents were auctioned off by the warehouse and we never heard about it any further. Our assets consisted of whatever Opa had brought with him and whatever we had been allowed to pack in the suitcases that we brought with us.

After various attempts at making a living had failed, including a coffee and tea business which never got off the ground, Opa was working as a furniture finisher and, "Man Friday" in a second hand furniture shop on 178th Street and Broadway, when we arrived in the US. From the owner of that used furniture store we learned our first lesson in the US. When Opa introduced us to the owner, who was a step-cousin of Oma, he reached into his pocket and gave us boys each a coin. We did not want to accept the gift whereupon he taught us that in the US, if someone wants to give you money, you take it first, and ask questions later.

Jobs were hard to find in those days, particularly if you were an orthodox Jew and needed to leave early on Friday afternoons in the winter, as well as to be off on the Jewish Holidays. But Opa never wavered; giving up his beliefs was never an option. As time went on, the family had to sell off the silver houseware items that we had been permitted to take out of Germany, in order to put bread on the table and to buy new clothing for the boys.

The clothing that we had from Germany made us stand out from others like a sore thumb. Therefore, one of our first outings was down to the Lower East Side to be outfitted with new pants and jackets so that we would not be the laughing stock of the other students once we started attending school.

Having been on the run from the Nazi's for a number of years as a boy, it was only natural that it had affected our entire way of thinking. Even after we got to New York, if, when walking on the street, I would encounter a group of kids coming toward me, I would cross the street in fright. It took me many years to get over that feeling. The same also applied to a policeman. If I would see one, my knees would start to shake.

After some time Opa was able to start a hides and skins business in New York City, the same type of business that he had had in Germany. He started originally with a partner, also experienced in that line of work, and with money to invest in it. When the partner, some years later, committed suicide over domestic issues, Opa somehow was able to continue on his own, but, at least initially, on a much smaller scale. His warehouse was in lower Manhattan, in the Pearl Street area. Where there are now modern skyscrapers, there were then old broken down buildings housing small businesses and warehouses. Opa rented space in one of those buildings consisting of the ground floor, basement, and sub-basement.

BACK TO SCHOOL I

Not having had any regular schooling since Kristallnacht 1938, it was time for us to start all over. Although we had learned a little English in the last years in Frankfurt, it was hardly enough to make conversation. As a result, when we began to attend public school the month after our arrival in the US, we were held back a semester and received special help for learning English.

We started public school in February, 1941, at P.S. 115 on 177th Street, just a block from where we lived at that time. Herman started in 9B, which was the second semester of junior high school, and I started in 8B, which was the last semester in elementary school. Although we struggled with the English language for some time still, our schooling in Germany had put us considerably ahead of the other students in many subjects, particularly in math. As a result, we were both able to skip a grade at the end of the semester.

While finishing junior high school, I applied for admission to Stuyvesant High School in lower Manhattan, which was then and still is now one of the three best high schools in New York. I was admitted and I entered Stuyvesant in January, 1942. By taking full sessions during each summer, I was able to graduate already in May, 1944, with the graduation ceremony being held on the

stage of Carnegie Hall.

As a little boy already, I had always been interested in automobiles, pushing match boxes along the frames of the Persian carpets in the living room, in a make-believe street scene. This interest did not change as I grew up, and it was therefore only natural that upon graduation from high school, I applied for and was accepted to the Engineering School of the College of the City of New York. Although I had also applied for, and had been accepted to NYU, there never was any alternative to CCNY, for financial reasons.

Despite warnings that to be an engineer, particularly in the auto industry, would be nearly impossible for an orthodox Jew, I went ahead and started at CCNY's uptown campus in August, 1944. I found some of the basic engineering courses, such as drafting, were simply incompatible for my hands and head. Also, although I had been very good at geometry and trigonometry in high school, calculus was just not my cup of tea. In addition, Herman had already been drafted into the army in January 1944, and since I was going to be 18 in March, 1945, I knew I was going to be drafted then as well. For all these reasons, I started to flounder in school, getting D's and F's in some of the basic courses needed for an engineering degree. I was put on probation by CCNY in June, 1945.

Although I turned 18 in March, I had been deferred for 6 months to enable Herman to be discharged from the army. He had served in the European theater with the Counter Intelligence Corps. The draft had been eased since the war had already ended in Europe. I was drafted, therefore, only in September 1945, the same month the Japanese surrendered. The story goes, that when the Japanese heard that Norbert Strauss was entering into the Army, they threw up their hands and surrendered.

IN THE ARMY

I reported to Ft. Dix, New Jersey for further assignment and basic training. On the second day, I was selected for kitchen duty and spent 24 hours cleaning cheese and spaghetti out of huge pots. Since that day, the smell of cooked cheese still makes me sick.

I was assigned to Ft. McClelland, Alabama for basic infantry training. Food, naturally, was always a problem, as it had been for every Orthodox GI before me. But I established a relationship with a cook, who would always tell me which vegetable dishes contained no unacceptable ingredients. Oma kept me supplied with packages which, naturally, everyone in my bunk expected me to share with them. Surprisingly, however, the guys just could never develop a taste for half-spoiled meat or salami that had been in transit from New York for over a week. But candy and chocolate went very well. I developed pneumonia a few weeks into the training and ended up in the base hospital for a few days.

One day during basic training, I was called into the company commander's office. With my heart in my pants I stood there while he told me that I had been selected to become an instructor at West Point. I was never given any details, such as - instructor of what. Nor did I ask any questions. In fact, I do not think that what I had been told really sank in until much later. It was

just a few days later when I was called again to the company commander's office that I was told to forget about it, since, in order to be an instructor at West Point, one had to be a US citizen, which I was not. The instructor's position would have been nice, since it would have meant that I could have gone home often for weekends. Many years later I contacted the army, under the Freedom of Information Act and ask for a copy of my army records in order to find out what they had in mind for me. Unfortunately, my records had been destroyed in a warehouse fire and there was no longer any information available.

A little while later, while out in the field, dirty and unshaven (the little I had, didn't have to be shaven every day), a jeep drove up with orders to take me back to camp immediately. Back at camp, still not having been told what was going on, I was switched to a sedan accompanied by two officers, and driven into Anniston, Alabama, the town nearest to the camp. We stopped at the court house and went before a judge who asked me a few routine questions and asked me to raise my right hand. In five minutes I had become a US citizen. An hour later I was back in the field, feeling ten feet tall.

I finished basic training in late December 1945 or early January 1946, and after a two week furlough, reported to an army base in Georgia for reassignment. The fellow who had the bunk on top of mine was from Seattle. When we learned where we were going we were both amazed. He knew no languages and he was being sent to interpreter school to learn German. I, who was fluent in German, was being sent to the Pacific theater. There is a saying: "There is a right way and a wrong way, and there is the army way." This was the army way. We were transported by train from Georgia to San Francisco. It certainly was a scenic ride, completely from east to west. After a few days in a camp, we boarded a troopship, destination Pacific Theater of Operation. At that point, although the war was over, we had not yet been told where we were going. Only a few days later an announcement was made that we were going to Korea or Chosen, as it had been called previously. The typical American education is weak in geography. As a consequence most of the GI's just looked at each other. They had no idea where Korea was, having never heard that name previously. Since geography had always been one of my strengths, I was able to "educate" my fellow GI's on the subject. Over the following days a series of talks were given, explaining the history of the country and why we were going there. The country had been occupied by the Japanese under a very brutal regime, and we were the liberators who were going to establish a democracy.

One Friday night, there was a call for all those of "Hebrew Religion" who were interested in religious services, to assemble at a certain point and time. I went and stood around in an over-packed room, until an officer addressed us (he was not Jewish and there was no Jewish Chaplain on board) and asked for a volunteer to lead the services. I was much too timid to speak up although I am sure, had I led the services, very few, if any, would have known whether I had done it correctly or not. When no one volunteered, the officer told everybody to go back to their bunks. That was the only call for religious services that I had as long as I was overseas. I never saw or even heard of a Jewish chaplain in Korea, although once I got settled I made some inquiries. When we arrived in Inchon we were told that the ship could not dock; in fact, there were no piers whatsoever. The harbor was so shallow at low tide, that all vessels had to stop outside of the port and the troops had to climb down the side of the ship, with all their gear, into a landing craft.

KOREA

From Inchon we were trucked to Seoul, the capital of Korea, where we were going to be stationed. Our sleeping accommodations were in a former Japanese cavalry barracks. Since it had been only a few months since the US Army had entered Korea and started cleaning up the place, it was still a filthy mess. Our first assignment was to clean up the place. Then regular duty started by our replacing the combat troops that had come to Korea from Okinawa, so that they could return to the US. Their job in Seoul had been guard duty and nothing but guard duty, all day and night, every day of the week. Guard duty at the ammunition dumps, bridges, government buildings, troop quarters, hospitals, various embassies, etc.

We were assigned rotations, so that every duty was at a different place than the previous one. It was a routine of two hours on and four hours off, with a day off once in a while. There were no exceptions to this rule, such as trying to get the day off on a Saturday. Nor was there any opportunity to celebrate Shabbos. So I did the best I could under the circumstances, by myself.

The most coveted place for guard duty were the assignments to the Army Nurses and Female Officer quarters. They were housed near the hospital in a temporary building made of wooden slats, with many cracks in between. Need I say more?

My friend Jerry and I always tried to get assigned together, so that we could talk to each other. One pitch black night we were assigned to the residence of the US Ambassador who lived in a mansion surrounded by an iron fence. The only entrance was through a large locked gate which had to be opened by the two guards that were stationed immediately outside at the gate. Since it was night, with nothing else to do, we decided that if and when the Ambassador would come home while we were on duty, we would greet him like Buckingham Palace guards. We knew he was being driven around in a large old Cadillac with the US and embassy flags on the front fenders. When after a while we saw the headlights, we got ready, and when the car stopped at the gate to await our opening it, we slammed to attention with a stiff rifle salute. The Ambassador had no choice but to open the rear window and to return our salute. In addition, he also asked his chauffeur to write down our names, serial numbers, and unit. As we found out later, when we were called in to our Company Commanders office, he had communicated our action through official Army channels to our Company Commander, who entered the commendations in both of our files.

One time, when I was on guard duty at the ammunition depot together with a few others, a bunch of jeeps together with a sedan drove up and out stepped General Eisenhower for an "inspection". He stopped at each of the GI's, said a few words, shook hands and continued on. Since my knees were shaking, my mouth was frozen, and both my mind and my rifle were saluting, I do not remember a word of what he said.

Aside from pulling guard duty, my company (C Company, 36th Infantry Battalion, 7th Army Division) was also part of the Honor Battalion of the Division. Consequently, we had to go on parade whenever someone important came to Korea. That also meant hours and hours of practice parades (great - I love military band music) and always having our uniforms and equipment spick and span clean and in order. The highest rank that we ever paraded for, was General MacArthur,

when he came on a brief visit from Japan to the back country. For that, we stood for hours on the hot landing strip at the airport.

Naturally, no one liked pulling guard duty, but there was little one could do about it unless you had special connections. Except for my immediate surroundings, I had been nowhere, did not know anyone other than my buddies, and therefore was resigned to being on guard duty until we left.

Oma had other ideas for her son. One of her neighbors in synagogue was Mrs. Kissinger, whose older son, Henry would later become Secretary of State. Her younger son, Walter had fought with the US Army in Okinawa, had eventually elected to take his discharge while still stationed in Korea and remained in Korea working as a high ranking civilian employee of USAMGIK (United States Army Military Government in Korea). His job was that of liaison officer between the army and the Department of Commerce of the new Korean government. Anything that the army wanted from the DoC, and vice versa, had to go through Walter. So one day, the two mothers were comparing notes about their respective sons, and when Mrs. Kissinger heard what my "job" was, she suggested that I contact Walter and he would see what he could do for me there.

As soon as I received Oma's letter (it took weeks since all mail traveled by sea), I called Walter and I went to see him. He was stationed in the Capitol Building in Seoul, with a big impressive office and a secretary, with a room full of staff. He told me that there would be no problem in getting me out of the infantry and into the Military Government. I should just file an application for reassignment to the military government through my company office, and when it would reach him, he would endorse it for attachment to his staff. It sounded easy enough at that point. Little did I know that all Company Commanders already had orders from the Battalion Commander, a West Point Major Bong, that, due to a serious shortage of personnel, there would be no transfers out of that battalion. When I eventually spoke to my Company Commander, who in civilian life had been a butcher in Montana, he told me of his orders. Nevertheless, if I wanted him to, he would pass my request up through channels and await a reply. The reply was not long in coming - rejection by Major Bong.

I called Walter (or Mr. Kissinger, as I called him, although he was only a few years older than I) and he told me not to worry, that he would now file a transfer request for me through Corps Headquarters, and certainly Major Bong would not again reject it coming down from his superiors. But it was not to be - Major Bong again rejected the second request. Again Walter told me over the phone not to worry; a solution would be found sooner or later.

And a solution was found only a few weeks later. I found out that something was going on when, once again, I was pulled off duty in the middle of the day and told to pack my gear and be ready that afternoon to be transported to the Military Government Headquarters for reassignment. When I reported to Walter the next day, he told me the following story, documented with papers that he showed me.

MY ARMY OFFICE JOB

I have already identified Major Bong as my Battalion Commander who, twice had rejected my request for a transfer out of the infantry into the Military Government. In addition to being Battalion Commander, Major Bong was also the Supply Officer for the 7th Division. As such, he had responsibility for all purchasing and manufacturing required by the division.

One day, a few weeks after the second rejection, Major Bong asked Mr. Kissinger for an appointment. Mr. Kissinger, naturally, immediately recognized the name, although Major Bong did not know Mr. Kissinger in any capacity. When Major Bong met with Mr. Kissinger he inquired as to whether it would be possible for the Korean aluminum industry to manufacture mess trays for the division, since at that time the army in Korea was still eating out of field mess kits. Mr. Kissinger answered affirmatively, but with a provision that he be granted a favor from Major Bong. Major Bong, obviously overjoyed that his mission had been successful, agreed to whatever Mr. Kissinger was about to request. Mr. Kissinger, thereupon, asked that PFC Norbert Strauss be allowed to transfer from the infantry to the Military Government. That is how I ended up in the Korean Department of Commerce, which, upon reflection, would have a major impact on my future.

Not only was my new work environment a major change for the better, but my living quarters were vastly improved as well. I was now an office clerk, on the day shift, with no nighttime responsibilities and free on Sundays. Saturday was still a regular work day.

My first assignment, when I reported for work the following day, was to run a manual stencil copy machine, of the type then in use in all offices. By the end of the day, my hands, and sometimes, uniform, were purple since the ink easily came off of the stencils being used.

From then on, until I returned to the US in 1947, I advanced, not only in position and responsibilities, but also in rank, rather quickly. Walter, as he increased my responsibilities in his department, needed to move me into higher rank as quickly as possible, so that I could deal with civilians, both US and Korean, as well as military personnel, on an equal footing. Consequently, although as a civilian he could only recommend promotions to the military, his recommendations were carried through as quickly as the papers could move (which in the army is not always very fast). I had been a PFC when I came there, then Corporal, then Sergeant, and Walter's request for my promotion to Staff Sergeant was in the pipeline, only to miss out by a few days, since my file had already been returned to the US, in anticipation of my return. Being promoted almost three times in a period of about 10 months was not bad. As far as titles were concerned on the civilian side, which was something Walter could control, I had obviously started as an office clerk, but ended with the dual title of Sergeant Major (for the military personnel) and Chief Clerk (for the civilian personnel) of the Department of Commerce.

To quote from my Army Separation Qualification Record:

“Administrative Non Commissioned Officer 502

Served over 10 months in Korea with Headquarters and Headquarters Company US Army Military Government in Korea. Supervised and directed work of 80 enlisted men as Sergeant

Major Department of Commerce. Coordinated work of Korean civilian and military personnel. Prepared required correspondence.”

My Discharge Certificate also carries the notation: “Recommended for further military training”.

If, the reader seems to get the impression that I am patting myself on the back, and that I seem to be proud of what I accomplished there --- you are so right. The reader must remember that I was an 18 year old boy when I entered the army, having just failed in college. I was an almost 20 year old man when I was discharged in February, 1947 and the above quotes are evidence of the change.

This change from boy to man brought about another type of adjustment in me. I was determined that when I returned to New York, I would enter college again and be successful at it. With that in mind, I had gone to a school which the Army maintained in Korea and took several courses for which I eventually received credit in college, in addition to the credits given for having served in the Armed Forces. I left New York a failure in engineering, switched my major while in Korea, and re-entered the College of the City of New York , Baruch Business School, working toward a BBA.

GEISHA HOUSE

Since the office was closed on Sunday, my friend, Fred, and I (we were both corporals at the time) would often spend hours taking a jeep into the mountains, loaded down with candies and chocolate for the children in the hundreds of small villages that dotted the landscape. We always got a hero's reception when we appeared, and it was difficult to part from them.

One day we heard, that on one of the following Sundays, there would be a big celebration in Inchon for the one year anniversary of the reopening of the Inchon Locomotive Works, a major industrial enterprise in Inchon. The guest of honor would be Syngman Rhee, who is to the Koreans, what George Washington is to the US. He would eventually become Korea's first President. He was going to address the assembled guests who would include high ranking civilians from the US and Korea, as well as many generals and colonels. They were asking for volunteers to chauffeur the sedans transporting the highest ranking guests from Seoul to Inchon. Although neither of us had ever driven an army sedan, we decided that it sounded like a good way to spend a Sunday. We both volunteered, and on the designated Sunday, picked up our load of guests. We traveled in a convoy, under guard front and rear, and when we arrived in Inchon, we were directed to the factory where we dropped off our passengers. We were then taken by the guards to a motor pool (parking lot) and were told to be ready in about four hours to pick up our passengers again.

We stood on the side of the road together with tens of thousand of Koreans, awaiting the arrival of Syngman Rhee. When his motorcade finally arrived and drove past, the Koreans bent at their waist, up and down, shouting “Banzai, Banzai”.

Four hours was a long time to wait doing nothing. The other drivers left the motor pool and

found themselves a bar. That left Fred and I looking at each other, wondering what to do. We almost simultaneously had the same thought - to go to the factory and see what was going on. When we got there, Syngman Rhee was addressing the crowd, and since he was speaking in Korean, very few Americans understood anything.

We walked around a little (we certainly were not supposed to be there) and found a large room that had been set up and decorated for a reception. With a few questions to the workers there, we found out that there would be a reception line of the 15 to 20 highest ranking guests, and that Syngman Rhee would come in, be introduced, and shake hands with everyone. At least that was what had been planned. But they had not reckoned with the presence of two corporals.

We were still standing near the entrance to the reception room, when, through another door, the guests entered and started forming a reception line along the wall, with the lowest rank nearest to the door (where the two corporals stood) and the highest rank down the line. It was only a few minutes later that a commotion was heard behind us, and there came Syngman Rhee toward the door where the two corporals were still hanging around. He came to Fred, reached out his hand as if that was the beginning of the reception line, and Fred shook it. Syngman Rhee stepped to the right, in front of me and I also shook his hand. By that time he was past the door entrance and had a full view of what lay ahead. He must have decided that it was too much hand shaking, and marched into the room, waving to the reception line but not shaking a single other hand. Two corporals, who had no business being there in the first place, were the only ones honored with a hand shake. We decided that we had pushed our luck far enough and high-tailed it out of there.

After a while, when it looked like the celebration was coming to an end, we returned to the motor pool since we did not want to be caught having left our cars. Eventually the guards picked us up again and took us back to the factory to pick up our passengers. We naturally assumed that the convoy would immediately go back to Seoul since it was now early evening. Instead, the guards (who were MP's) took the whole convoy past a series of flashing red lights, into the Red Light District, which was off limits to all military personnel. Here we were, entering the Red Light District under direction of MP's with a load full of Americans in the cars. After a few turns we were stopped at a building, decorated with many lights. The MP, who opened the car door for the passengers, told us that this was a Geisha House. A Geisha House, we had been told, in common soldier language was a house of prostitution. We would shortly find out how wrong we were. The passengers got out, and the guards took us back to the motor pool. We were told we could do what we wanted until around midnight, at which time we would be picked up again. The other drivers disappeared into the bar again, leaving Fred and me with nothing to do. It was less than half an hour later when the guards came back and told us to lock the cars and come with them. Another adventure lay ahead.

The guards drove us back past the flashing red lights to the Geisha House, and we were told to go to the first floor. Now picture this. Two corporals enter a room, like a small ball room with a long low table running its length and a dance floor at the level of the table, on one side. All the "seats", which were pillows, along both sides of the long narrow table, except for two, were occupied by the passengers of all the cars, generals, colonels, and high ranking civilians both Korean and American. The two empty seats were in the middle on both sides of table, in other words the seats of honor. The head geisha directed the two of us to those seats, where, upon seating ourselves, we were immediately surrounded by a gaggle of young and pretty geisha girls.

As we subsequently learned, since the average age of the other guests was probably in the fifties, they, the Korean hosts, wanted some younger blood, and we two were the only handy ones

around. Since it was at the request of the hosts, the officers could not object, although I am sure they were not comfortable with the situation.

As we sat there, surrounded by our harem, the head Geisha would come over every once in a while to shoo some of the girls away and toward the other men. But they always returned. They insisted that we were not allowed to take any of the food by ourselves, but they had to prepare and feed it to us by hand. The tables were bending under the weight of platter after platter of stuff that I did not recognize as being edible. Many things looked like they must have crawled at one time, on or under the earth, at the time of the Creation. I could not, would not, touch any of it for a number of reasons, despite the pleading of the girls in whatever language they were trying to communicate. I allowed them to peel me mandarins, take out the pits, and put it into my mouth, provided their hands were clean. I also allowed them to pour me Saki (Rice Wine) which I consumed in moderation, knowing that I did not have a designated driver for later.

A Korean band played music and a few who could, danced with the girls. I did not know how, and the girls did not want to share me, anyhow. So I just watched the interesting scene. Since the dance floor was only slightly below eye level, and since everybody had taken their shoes off upon entering the building, I was fascinated by the sight of a dancing general with a huge hole in his sock.

After a few hours, when the noise level had become uncomfortable, about 10 or 15 of the men, including the two corporals, were invited to enter to a small room, where the partying continued but in a quiet setting. Fred and I had "only" two or three girls with us in that room. The others sadly had to stay with the boring old generals. During that time, one of the civilians, a department head from Seoul, was evicted, since, having had too much to drink, he could not or would not keep his hands off the girls. That was absolutely forbidden.

Here is where we learned what this Geisha House was. It certainly is not what the GI's dreamed about, but rather nothing more than an Oriental-style night club, with entertainment, music, dancing, eating and drinking. I am sure the other kind existed as well, but certainly this one was not it.

At about midnight we picked up our cars, bragged to the other drivers about our experience, loaded up and returned to Seoul. A day and a night to remember and to tell our children about.

RETURN TO THE U.S.

Sometime in early 1947 my orders to return to the US came through and I said goodbye to all the many friends I had made, both in the military, as well as among the natives.

I had always obtained my allotment of cigarettes from the army, but since I did not smoke, I always gave them to a Korean friend. Since they didn't cost very much, I never asked him for payment, but he brought me little presents from time to time, such as native fruits grown on his

parents' farm. When I said goodbye to him he gave me a gold ring with a little diamond, but the gold was so pure, that just shaking some one's hand while wearing the ring, would make the circle into an egg-shaped form. Consequently when I returned to New York, I gave it to Oma who had a pin made out of it. Esther now has the pin. I have seen her wear it.

The ship on which I departed from Korea together with a few hundred other GIs, stopped in Yokohama to take on the balance of the load. Since it would take a half day, anyone who wanted to get off and do some sightseeing could do so. We were warned to be back after 4 hours, because the ship would wait for no one. I went ashore with a bunch of others, we walked around, took pictures, and admired the Japanese girls, who, to us Westerners, looked no different than the Korean girls.

We landed in Seattle after about ten days and were then transported by rail to Ft. Dix, New Jersey, where it all had started about one and a half years earlier. I was discharged and I went home to Washington Heights.

BACK TO SCHOOL II

I was determined to go back to college and the first thing I did was to apply for reinstatement to the College of the City of New York, for admission to the Baruch School of Business. I was accepted on a probation basis, and was given a number of credits for having served in the army, as well as for the some of the courses I had taken in the in the Army School in Seoul.

Before starting college, Opa and I went on a skiing vacation in Canada. There was a small kosher hotel in St. Agathe du Mont, which we reached by changing trains in Montreal. We had a lot fun together although we seemed to spend more time sliding on our behinds than on our skis. I met a young lady there who lived in Montreal and we spent several pleasant hours together. She happened to take the same train home as we did. When I said good bye to her on the train platform, I gave her a kiss right in front of Opa, who was aghast, and was still shaking his head hours later. I guess it was then that he realized the degree to which the army had changed me.

I started at Baruch in June 1947 and graduated with a BBA degree in June 1949 with a B-average.

WORKING WHILE IN SCHOOL

Because Opa was still struggling to establish his hides and skins business, it was necessary for us boys to make money whenever possible, even while going to school.

Every summer, even if we were going to school, we had jobs. One summer I worked for a cleaning store making deliveries, carrying huge bundles of clothing, sometimes even carpets, on my back. There was no pay, but I depended on the tips. Unfortunately, not everyone tipped. Deliveries were mostly made by streetcar, which ran on Broadway. I was paid by the store to ride one way. The return had to come out of my tips, or I had to walk back. I remember one particular party on 168th Street, who not only never tipped, but also gave me a load of dirty laundry to take back to the store.

Another time I worked in a factory making leather buttons for sport coats and jackets. The factory had about 10 employees, some of whom were cutting strips of leather to a specific measured length, and others who were folding the strips into shapes and then pressing them on a steam powered press, into the proper shapes. My job, as a beginner, was to cut the leather strips into specific lengths, depending on the size of the button desired. The average age of the other employees was probably around 55-60. They worked at a measured pace, just fast enough to avoid the boss jumping on them, which he did often. Knowing that I would be there for only two months, I naturally worked as fast as I could because I enjoyed working, although I did not have to use much of my brain for it. The objective was to have only the leather, and not your fingers under the knife when cutting. I produced in two hours as much as the others did in a full day, earning a pat on the back from the boss (I was not paid by the piece, but by the hour), and the enmity of my co-workers. They were happy to see me leave at the end of the summer.

Oma, in the beginning, took a job as a house cleaner with several families and as a result we boys learned at an early age, what our responsibilities were at home; namely, doing the laundry, washing the floor, ironing, doing the dishes, going shopping, etc. Later when Opa's business required office help, Oma became Opa's back office, doing the billing and bookkeeping. For years, any spare time was taken up with in-house work that Oma took on to supplement our income. At one time, we manufactured different kinds of artificial flowers. At another time, we made cuff links for shirt manufacturers which consisted of two mother-of-pearl buttons that were linked by two metals loops using a pair of pliers.

Once Opa's business was up and running, we boys constituted part of his labor force. We worked in the warehouse whenever we could, before or after school and on Sundays. For example, when I went to Stuyvesant HS, there were two sessions. I attended the morning session which started very early and finished by early afternoon. From school I would go to the warehouse to work, and then home to do homework and study in the evening. We also had Hebrew classes in the evening in Washington Heights.

Since many of Opa's major suppliers were slaughterhouses, they would not allow our merchandise to be worked on and loaded into trucks from Monday to Friday, when meat products were being moved about. Consequently that left Saturday and Sunday. Since we could not work on Shabbos, that left a 24 hour period from Saturday night to Sunday night to get the job done. Many times, after the end of Shabbos, the crew would take the truck(s) and drive to the

slaughterhouse, work there through the night and the following day, only taking meal breaks, and return with the loaded trucks late on Sunday night.

Opa, having worked in that line for many years, naturally knew all the ins and outs. He knew exactly how the work had to be done, because it had always been done that way. Being a teenager, I naturally felt, like all other teenagers, that I knew better, and therefore I could do the work differently, better, and faster. Opa first strongly objected to my changes, but when he saw the results of my work, he had to admit that the quality was as good as that of anyone else and the quantity was far greater. Then and there I learned that when a job is being done in a certain way, and for no other reason except that it had always been done that way, it is time for a change, or at least time for a re-evaluation. Partially because of these differences with Opa, but mostly because I did not see much of a future for myself in the hides and skins business, I decided not to work permanently for Opa when I graduated from college.

GETTING A JOB

Immediately upon graduation from college, Opa arranged an interview for me with a business associate, a company by the name of Herman Hollander Inc. They were brokers in hides and skins and many other commodities. The interview with the treasurer went very well, and I was told that they were interested in me and that I would hear from them shortly. I did get an acceptance from them a few days later, but by then I already had been hired by another company.

The day after the interview with Herman Hollander Inc. I had an interview at Philipp Brothers Inc., which had been arranged by Oma. Oma had a school friend from Hamburg working there with good connections to the Chairman of the Board, Mr. Siegfried Ullmann. I was interviewed by Mr. Ullmann together with Mr. Salomon Fischmann who was the Manager of the Traffic Department. The entire interview had taken about 15 minutes when Mr. Ullmann turned to Mr. Fischmann and said that he thought that I could be of use in Traffic. Mr. Fischmann only nodded and I was considered hired.

These two interviews would be the only interviews for a job that I would ever have in my life.

I spent 36 years working for Philipp Brothers, and never looked back until I took early retirement at the end of 1985.

PHILIPP BROTHERS, INC.

I had graduated from college in June 1945, and I started at Philipp Brothers on July 5th.

My first "office" consisted of a semi-automatic calculator on a small 2'x1' adding machine table, located in the office of the Traffic Manager, Mr. Fischmann. Consequently, I was always under observation and Mr. Fischmann had a habit of, once in a while when he was passing me, throwing a question at me about the particular transaction that I was working on. He wanted to find out whether I knew and understood what I was doing or whether I was just doing it mechanically. It was a good way of keeping me on my toes, but I was exhausted by the end of the day from the strain. This lasted for some months, until, I guess, he was convinced that I would make it. My work during these months consisted strictly of calculations, adding, subtracting, multiplying, dividing, percentages, decimal places etc. No higher math, but pages and pages and hours of work, just to calculate the value of one shipment.

PB, in those early years, was primarily a merchant dealing mostly in ores and concentrates, as well as metals and scrap. The company had its origin in Europe, mostly Germany, and had been founded by several German Jews who had come over, with experience in metals and ores. The history of the firm, in fact, the history of metal trading, and how it came to be controlled by Jews of German origin, is an interesting subject in itself. It is fully described in a book, Philipp Brothers, the History of a Trading Giant 1901-1985 by Helmut Waszkis published in 1987 and second edition in 1992 as Philipp Brothers, the Rise and Fall of a Trading Giant 1901-1990.

The firm imported, exported, and had international and domestic business to and from any country that produced raw materials or consumed raw materials. The Traffic Department took care of all the paper work, including moving the merchandise, having it weighed, sampled, analyzed, invoiced and documented and paid for. A "shipment" could consist of a cargo as large as 20,000 tons chrome concentrates from Turkey to Baltimore, or as little as a few drums of high value tungsten scrap being shipped from Chicago to Newark.

When my initial testing period was over, I was given a regular desk in a large room occupied by maybe 5 or 6 other clerks doing similar work. Slowly, step by step, I was given more responsible work to do, until the day came when I was allowed to handle a shipment by myself. (The first transaction that I was permitted to handle by myself, was 250 tons of Trepca Brand lead that had been unloaded from the S/S Hrvatska of the Yugoslav Line at Pier Foot of 17th Street, Brooklyn, under contract number 18196-P, and was being shipped by Municipal Haulage, Inc. to Flemm Lead Corporation in Brooklyn. Sorry, I do not remember the name of the truck driver.)

When I started in Traffic it consisted of about 7 or 8 employees. At its peak in the early 1980s the department would have a staff of about 160.

Some years later, I would be responsible for the complete handling and administration of the Jugometal account. Jugometal was the Yugoslavian government's metals monopoly, with which PB had an agency contract for all of their output of all their mines and factories. Among my responsibilities was the record keeping of advances paid to Jugometal, as a tool for management

in deciding whether, and to what extent, additional money advances could be given when requested. These were the years before computers and spread sheets were done by hand.

Once, Mr. Ludwig Jesselson, who was then President of PB and was the executive responsible for that account, called me into his office to look over my records. As I was leaning over his desk and pointing to the spread sheet. I looked down, and to my utter shock and dismay, saw that my tie was hanging in his glass of tea. Unfortunately there was no hole in the floor that I could crawl into. Mr. Jesselson took it quite calmly, and allowed me to squeeze the tea out of my tie into his glass, so as not to drip all over his desk. He then called his secretary for a new glass of tea. Talk about embarrassing moments. To this day I am careful as to where my tie hangs. Little did Mr.J. know then, that this clumsy clerk would one day allow our Benjy to marry his niece Claire.

Some years later, Mr. Fischman decided to work only part-time, and subsequently announced his retirement. At that point, there were three employees who had more or less similar responsibilities directly under Mr. Fischmann. I was the junior of the three in seniority and also in age. As he approached his retirement, Mr. Fischmann decided, together with management, that upon his retirement the Traffic Department would operate under a managing triumvirate. As little as I knew about business at the time, I nevertheless realized that a three-headed monster could never live for long. But we had not been asked, nor given a say in the matter. Upon Mr. Fischmann's retirement we three (Larry Cohen, Max Stern, and myself) more or less divided the work into three areas of responsibility. That worked satisfactorily within those areas, but anything of a more general nature, had to be discussed between us, and it always ended up with one of us (usually me) making the final decision and taking the final responsibility.

After a while, I saw that the situation was slowly becoming unbearable not only to us, but also to the other staff members when they needed a decision. I realized that we were making general decisions as a committee of three, and no efficient organization can ever be run by committee.

I went to Mr. Jesselson to explain the situation to him, but he was already fully aware of the problem. That is how obvious it had become. I asked Mr. Jesselson to appoint one of us three as the Traffic Manager, and the other two as Assistant Traffic Managers. He replied, that he would not oppose my being the Traffic Manager, but that, in view of the seniority of the other two, he could not initiate it. He concluded by telling me that since he could not do it, he would support me if I took the management of the department into my hands on my own.

He had handed me a hot potato. I could either drop it, or run with it. I decided, after some thought, to run with it, and proceeded from that day on to take the initiative of managing without ever having been appointed and without any announcement to anyone. I did not use my elbows, I continued to consult with the other two, but it slowly became obvious to everyone, that I had taken over the responsibility and was managing the department. Larry, Max and I never had a serious argument on any subject, and I made sure to never step on their toes.

Since the department was involved on a daily basis with hiring trucking companies or fixing freight bookings with railroads and steamship companies for huge quantities of freight, the competition to obtain business from us, or to keep competitors away from us, often brought to light the offer of bribes. It was understood within the department that any one accepting a bribe would immediately be terminated without a second chance. Moreover, any offer, or insinuation of a potential bribe, had to be brought to the attention of an officer immediately. Although a number of offers were brought to my attention, I never had to terminate an employee for accepting a bribe.

I recall only one personal instance of an attempted bribe. It happened in Providence R.I. We were moving thousands of truck loads of zinc metal off a ship into a US government depot. One day the owner of the trucking company handed me an envelope which I thought contained bills of lading. When I opened it, I discovered that it contained \$700 in cash. I returned it promptly to the individual and informed him never to try that with anyone at PB again. I reported the instance to Mr. Fischman, who was still the head of the department at the time.

The company was growing quickly and was opening offices, or establishing agencies, in all the major countries in Europe, as well as some in Asia, Africa, and Australia. Eventually PB would have offices in 25 countries, plus representatives or agents in many others.

What had started out with 35 employees in the New York office, quickly became hundreds, and then over a thousand all over the world. The company became known, as by far, the largest and best run metal trading outfit in the world, trading in over 50 commodities. Everything that they touched turned to gold and they could do no wrong. That eventually would be the company's undoing. From an origin in only metals, ores/concentrates and scrap, they became huge, as well, in the trading of sugar, precious metals, fertilizer, coal and coke, steel and many other commodities. Some oddities that were traded once were Bolivian cinchona bark (which is used to make quinine), and Mexican dried mosquitoes used in fish food.

Eventually, an oil trading department was opened, at a time when oil trading had previously been strictly the function of the big oil companies. This addition doubled and tripled sales and, at least initially, profits. Profits from oil trading became so large that some of the traders were not satisfied to receive only huge salaries and bonuses, but they wanted to participate more in the profits they were generating for the company. That resulted in the exodus of Marc Rich and Pinky Green and many other traders, who formed their own company to compete with PB. (They would later get into trouble with the US Government and were convicted for allegedly trading with Iran, and would in the year 2000 be pardoned by President Clinton)

The Traffic Department had always been the training ground for new employees, from where they then advanced into trading. That is how both Rich and Green and literally hundreds of other young men and women got their start over the years. I interviewed the majority, decided whether to hire or not, in a very unscientific way by today's standards, but it resulted in a very low turnover, and a generally very happy staff of employees. Terminating an employee was always very painful. But when it had to be done it was done quickly and without much talk. Fortunately, until the later liquidation of the company, terminations were rare and far between.

The procedure of hiring was very simple, compared with today's standards. Today, in a large organization, by the time a new applicant starts, the personnel file is already half an inch thick. In the days when I did the interviewing and hiring, we didn't even establish an individual file for each applicant.

In view of the fact that the company was founded by Jewish immigrants, mostly Orthodox, it was only natural that many Orthodox Jews would know of, or hear about job opportunities there. The result was that there always were a large number of Orthodox employees, especially in my department. I never specifically looked for Orthodox Jews, or even any Jews, but hired only on the basis of my judgment of qualification based on the interview and a mathematical skills test. We had female staff, even a female supervisor, which was rare in those days, as well as Afro-American and Hispanic employees, but not many.

We never advertised for open positions and never used employment agencies, but we always had a waiting list of applicants for openings in the Traffic Department. Some applicants were willing to start in the mailroom, which then gave them preferred consideration whenever there was an opening in Traffic. That is, for example, how Pinky Green, mentioned above, got his start.

I would interview the applicant after looking over the resume, and, if it was for a trainee position, that would be the only interview the applicant would have. If the applicant came with experience and would not have to start as a trainee, there would be a further interview conducted by the supervisor of the section for which the applicant was destined.

All applicants would be given a mathematical aptitude test and that was all that was required to make a decision.

The Traffic Department had a training section, whose supervisor, Mildred Epstein, had years of experience in the field and was our teacher of all trainees over many years. The trainee learned by actually doing constructive work, namely calculations of invoices and accountings of all the commodities handled by the company. As a result, when the trainee was then transferred into a commodity section, he or she was already experienced in that area.

We did not require a MBA, nor even a college degree, but any high school graduate could be an applicant, and would be hired if he/she passed the interview and the test. I once hired a practicing rabbi who wanted to change his career and he worked out just fine. In fact, I also once hired a young law school graduate, who had not yet passed his bar exam, but only after he promised me that even after he passes the bar, he would not leave PB. He was hired, and went on to eventually become the president of the company in its declining years. Another time, we hired one of the few MBA's that applied, and who spoke four languages. He did not last three months, because he could not handle the mathematics.

One of the responsibilities of the Traffic Manager was to assist in the establishment and organization of new offices as they were opened and staffed here and abroad. A second responsibility, aside from being responsible for the running of the Department in New York, that I inherited from my predecessor, Mr. Fischman, was the supervision and management of the world wide use of New York's marine insurance policies. As a consequence, all offices worldwide would have their marine insurance covered under New York's policy. I wrote a manual for use by everybody and it became the universal reference which employees, even when they left the company, would take with them for use in their new jobs.

As a result of these international responsibilities, I traveled from time to time to the various PB offices, particularly in Europe, to straighten out major problems or to give lectures to the staff on insurance.

After some years, having learned the ropes, I wrote a Traffic Manual as well. It included instructions in the do's and don't's of PB policy, procedures, form letters, anything that would be of help not only to new employees, but also as a guide to everyone. Both the Insurance and Traffic Manuals were always kept up to date with changes and additions and completely reissued every few years.

Since, as Traffic Manager it was also one of my responsibilities to approve payment of invoices and bills, as well as to sign dozens of checks every day, I had learned how to properly approach

that responsibility. If, one would assume that the invoice or expense bill that he is asked to approve is most likely correct, he would will overlook many errors. The correct approach is for one to assume that the invoice or bill is incorrect and that it is his/her responsibility to find the errors. That principle I continued to apply even later after leaving PB, and while working for volunteer organizations. Since invoices and checks for which I was responsible at PB often were in the seven figures, it was of the utmost importance to be careful.

Originally PB also had a chemicals division. In the 1940's that original company split into two parts. The chemicals division became Philipp Brothers Chemicals, headed by Siegfried Bendheim, and the metals division became Philipp Brothers Inc., headed by Siegfried Ullmann. PB Chemicals continued to exist until very recently, with its last its headquarters in Fort Lee N.J.

PB had started out as a private company, owned by the five senior officers. The company then changed its structure and became Philipp Brothers Ore Corporation, with a modest number of shares made available for purchase by some of its employees. Eventually PBO merged into Minerals and Chemicals Corporation of America, a New Jersey company listed on the NYSE. This, for the first time, enabled senior officers to cash out and solved the problem of settling with estates. Some time later, that entity, then known as Minerals and Chemicals Philipp Corporation, merged with Engelhard Corporation, also a New Jersey corporation. That company, headed by Mr. Engelhard, dealt primarily in precious metals, and it is said that he personally was the model for the book and movie, Goldfinger.

After the company was public and grew in size by leaps and bounds, management appointed officers from among the employees. I was appointed at first Assistant Vice President, later Vice President, and subsequently, Group Vice President which was one level below Senior Vice President.

The company thereafter split off the Minerals and Chemicals division, and later also the Engelhard portions, and then purchased the famous Wall Street firm of Salomon Brothers. As the company continued to grow, the Salomon portion became dominant, until in the 1980s, the breakup of what once was the world's largest metal trading firm, began. There are many reasons and theories for this breakup, but that is the subject of a different story.

In 1982, due to the changes taking place in the conduct of affairs, it was decided to decentralize Traffic, and to have each trader handle traffic under his own jurisdiction. With no department, there was no need for a department manager anymore. I transferred to the Steel Trading Department, where I supervised the trading activities of a new commodity for PB, namely, oil well steel drilling pipe, which during those boom years for oil drilling, had become a new section in the Steel Department, then managed by my friend Menno Ratzker. It was, like so many other PB ventures, a disaster, and when the drilling boom died out, everybody was stuck with huge inventories. But while it lasted it gave me the opportunity to learn something new, to trade for the first time, and to travel to Houston many times as well as to other places in the US also Mexico, Venezuela, Spain, France, Italy, Greece, and Romania amongst others.

Throughout the years I had been given the opportunity many times to go into trading. I had never accepted any of the offers, since I had felt I was better suited for traffic then for trading. A trader thinks in broad and general terms. For example, he would make a contract for a hundred tons of a commodity, whereas in traffic that commodity would be stipulated as a ton of either 2204.62 or 2240 or 2000 pounds depending on what type of ton was being traded. I felt more comfortable in the latter atmosphere of specifics. Also a trader's function was to buy cheap, meaning the seller

would get the lowest possible price, and to sell high, meaning the buyer would pay the highest price. I felt more comfortable with having a cargo weighed, sampled and analyzed, and then paying the supplier, and getting paid by the customer on the same basis. This was not an anti-business attitude, but simply a matter of personal preference.

During the 1980's with business deteriorating in one area after another, PB started closing down some of their overseas offices. One of those offices was the one in La Paz, Bolivia, one of the very early overseas offices, dating back to 1928. In the process of closing that office in 1987, one of the managers there became dissatisfied with the severance pay he had received and got a local judge to attach all the remaining PB assets in Bolivia. In order to try to resolve the dispute, PB sent two representatives to La Paz. One of the two was our son Benjy since he had been deeply involved in trading commodities (particularly Tungsten Concentrates) with Bolivian miners. Upon arrival in La Paz they were both arrested and placed under house arrest in their hotel rooms while the negotiations continued. When Benjy informed us what had happened, and when after several days there was no progress, I mulled over in my mind what action I could take to get him out. After all Benjy had never been involved with the management of the La Paz office and was only being held a hostage as a pawn in the negotiations. I considered offering myself as a substitute, since after all I was an officer of the firm. But I knew Benjy would never agree to that. My second thought was to lease a helicopter in Lima, Peru, fly legally into La Paz, and since I was sure the Bolivian Police was not very sophisticated, I would be able to drive into the city, pick up Benjy, get back to the airport and fly out before anyone would wake up. It is only about 100 miles from La Paz to the Peruvian boarder, and since I was flying legally I was not afraid of being shot down. Although I did talk to the manager of our Lima office, and he did start making inquiries about leasing a helicopter there, before fantasy had a chance to turn to reality, Benjy was released and came home, whereas the other man was still held for another few weeks before being released as well.

In the spring of 1985, I saw the handwriting on the wall, and notified management that I wanted to take early retirement at the end of the year. I was sure that by the end of the year the Steel Department as well as several other departments would be closed, with many employees laid off. Taking early retirement certainly had financial benefits, as compared with being laid off.

On December 31, 1985 the Steel Department and many other departments were closed, and for all practical purposes PB ceased to be structured as a functioning entity. Various departments continued for a number of years thereafter, but ultimately also closed or were sold off.

I left PB on December 31, 1985 after 36 1/2 years, having never been fired, laid off, or been without a job.

ROMANCE

The most popular place for young Orthodox Jewish boys and girls to go to for a summer weekend or vacation, was Gartenberg & Schechter's Pioneer Country Club in the Catskill Mountains, near Ellenville, New York . Hundreds of kids would get together there each summer and it was known that hundreds became couples and married over the years.

After I had started working at Philipp Brothers in 1949, I considered myself rich, making \$45 per week, and I also went to the Pioneer, first for weekends and then later, when I could afford it, also for a week. At the same time, a beautiful young lady also arrived there with her father from Providence, Rhode Island, to recuperate from surgery. We became friends and kept in touch by phone even after we both had returned home.

That was Trude J. Oelbaum.

Her parents and siblings had settled in Providence after coming to the US from Poland via Germany in the early 1920s. Trude was born in Providence in June 1928. She was the first in her immediate family to be accepted into Classical High School, a school that engaged in research on advanced methods of teaching and from which she graduated in June 1946. She was accepted at NYU Liberal Arts College as well as nursing school in Boston but illness and surgeries prevented her from starting. In 1947 she was well enough to reapply but she was rejected from nursing school because of her history of illnesses. She was accepted at R.I. College of Education (RICE) and entered in 1947. The death of her mother in December 1947 caused her sufficient medical problems to interrupt school again for a period of time. She attended classes intermittently, and received help from a tutor three times a week. Trude was able to continue this arrangement until 1949 but then had to leave RICE as a junior due to medical and surgical problems.

What had attracted me to her at first was her beauty, and later when I got to know her, her intelligence, liveliness, popularity, and the fact that she came from an Orthodox Jewish family.

We met again at the Pioneer the following summer, but we remained platonic friends to such an extent that we even discussed each other's friends and arranged for dates for each other. At one point Trude told me that she had received a proposal of marriage from a young man we had both met at the hotel. Trude asked me what I thought of him and whether she should accept. I did not particularly care for the guy, and I thought Trude could do much better than that. I told her so. Might something about her already have been telling me then and there that there would be better times ahead for both of us together?

Trude had relatives in New York that she came to visit once in a while which gave us the opportunity to meet more often. In 1951, the platonic friendship suddenly changed to love; I proposed, Trude accepted, we got engaged and told our respective families. At that point I had only met her father, whereas Trude had not met anyone of my family. I was invited to meet her family in Providence and she met mine in New York.

Trude's father was very Orthodox, even when compared with the Orthodox community in Washington Heights. For example, when I came to Providence for the first time over a weekend, Trude's father would not allow me to wear my school ring or my gloves on the street on

Shabbos, despite the cold weather.

Trude's mother had already passed away some years earlier. Trude had a younger brother, Ira an older brother, Charles and three older sisters, Ruth, Helen and Edith all living in Providence, and all employed at the Hasbro factory outside of Providence. Hasbro had been founded by the Hassenfeld brothers who were Trude's uncles. The Hassenfeld brothers had financially helped many of their relatives escape from Europe, and had given all of them jobs in their factory.

We got married on May 6th, 1951, although I had been at Philipp Brothers only for two years and I was earning the princely sum of \$55 per week. I was just a little over 24 years old and Trude was almost 23 years old at the time. We had rented an apartment in a new project under construction on Broadway, at the corner of Nagle Ave in Washington Heights, but we temporarily had to take a furnished apartment in the neighborhood until the construction was finished. When we needed an additional bedroom we moved to 4300 Broadway at the corner of 183rd Street, and then subsequently to 66 Overlook Terrace, all of which were in Washington Heights.

Although I had been warned by many in New York, including some from my own immediate family, that because of the different cultural backgrounds, the marriage would not work out, I used my own judgment, and went full steam ahead.

Trude had undergone a number of surgeries as a teenager, and she was cautioned that she would have difficulty becoming pregnant and if she succeeded in conceiving, she would not be able to carry to full term. I was well aware of her condition, nothing was kept from me, and love carried the day. Trude gave birth to a beautiful girl, our Esther, on May 15, 1952 and shortly then on March 12, 1954 to our wonderful son, Benjamin. Contrary to the medical warnings, Trude never felt better than during her pregnancies.

Throughout her lengthy and constant sickness and surgeries, starting well before our marriage, Trude always tried her best to keep a normal life as much as possible, taking care of our home and family to the best of her physical ability. Not always succeeding to our children's satisfaction, but always trying her best. Trude even tried to work outside of the house a number of times.

As a student in Providence, Trude had summer jobs including a stint on the assembly line at Hasbro (the toy manufacturer owned by her uncles the Hassenfeld brothers). Another summer she was found to be overqualified for selling cosmetics behind the counter at a local Rexal Drug Store, and they put her to work in the store office instead. After we were married she worked as a kindergarten teacher at Yeshiva Soloveichik in Washington Heights, but that lasted only two months until an outbreak of the measles. Because as a child Trude had not had the measles, she had to quit immediately. After Estie finished kindergarten in 1958, Trude was hired as a substitute teacher at Yeshiva Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch, based on the credits she had earned at RICE despite all her problems. She made herself available, meaning she was on call, for a number of years.

Trude's internist, Dr. Arnold Schonfeld, who had been my parents' doctor, was ours as well while we lived in New York, was not only our doctor, but has been and is to this day, a close and dear family friend. He was present and often participated in family occasions, both joyous and sad, and frequently graced the occasion by allowing us to listen to his learned words when he addressed his audience. In the late 1960s Trude went to work for Dr. Schonfeld several times a

week as an “office assistant” doing EKG’s, developing x-rays, doing lab tests and keeping books. In fact, for a while Estie also did lab work for Dr. S. at home with blood specimens brought home by Trude. No relevant epidemics, injuries or deaths were reported during that period.

GERMANY 1958

It was in 1958 when PB’s Amsterdam office was just a few years old and had been growing by leaps and bounds as the main PB office in Europe, that administrative and organizational help was needed from the New York office. I was asked to go to Amsterdam for a month and, naturally, took Trude with me. We deposited Esther with my mother, and Benjy with Trude’s sister Helen, in Providence, and off we went.

It was mostly a regular work day in the Amsterdam office, helping them set up a traffic organization and teaching them marine insurance.

Opa had asked me, that if possible, he would like me to visit his birthplace Schmitten in Germany, and to check the condition of the cemetery to see whether it was being well maintained.

Since we had left Germany in 1941, I had not returned except on business, and then I never stayed there over night. If I had to be on business in northern Germany, I would stay in Amsterdam, conduct my business in Germany, and return to Amsterdam for the night. I would do the same from Switzerland, if I had to be in southern Germany.

But having been asked by my father, I decided to take a few days off and went to Germany with Trude. We took a train to Duesseldorf, rented a car and drove down the Rhine Valley via Cologne and Mainz, along the Main River, to Frankfurt. Unfortunately, by the time we arrived at our destination, Trude was too sick to continue. I had to leave her at the hotel in Frankfurt when I continued on by car the next day.

At the request of Oma, since I was already in Frankfurt, I passed by the houses that we had lived in and took photos. The last house in which we had lived in before fleeing in 1941 was the only house on the street that was not there anymore, having been hit by a stray bomb sometime in 1943 or 1944.

From Frankfurt I drove to Bad Homburg, where I had been born, took pictures of the houses we had lived in, and continued on to Dornholzhausen, where Opa’s first warehouse had been, and took more pictures for Opa.

I did not stop to talk to anyone, except to ask for directions to my destinations.

From Dornholzhausen, I drove to Schmitten in the Taunus Mountains. After taking pictures of the original Strauss Hotel, I asked for directions to the cemetery. Fortunately, I had rented a Volkswagen Beetle, since no regular size car would have been able to make it into the hills. I found the cemetery to be neat and orderly, well fenced-in, with all the gravestones standing. Opa

had been sending money from time to time to the local Catholic priest to help defray the expenses of maintaining the cemetery.

From Schmitten I returned directly to Frankfurt, where I returned the car to the rental agency. Trude was well enough at that point, and willing to continue on.

I had arranged to complete my trip with a business visit to a company with which PB had done a lot of business in the past and with which it would continue to do so for many years thereafter. The name of the company was Hermann C. Starck, Inc.. They had their office and factory in Goslar im Harz, which was near what was then the East German border. Mr. Starck, in the early years of the Nazis, had been imprisoned by the Nazis.

We took a train to Hannover, where we were picked up by one of the managers, Mr. H. Lahusen, and driven to Goslar. By the time we reached our hotel Trude again was quite sick, and it was difficult to find a doctor since it was late evening. Fortunately, Mr. Lahusen was able to locate a visiting medical professor from the University of Berlin who came over to see Trude. After examining her wrote a prescription and told me where there was an all night "Apotheke." The next day, after a few hours at the Stark office and factory, we were driven back to Hannover and took a train back to Amsterdam. I left Germany for the second time without regrets and without happy memories.

ISRAELI ARMY

It was in 1982, at the time when PB was decentralizing the Traffic Department, and before I started working in the Steel Department, that Trude and I were at a hotel in the mountains for a vacation. A group of Israeli army officers had been invited by the hotel owners to talk to the guests about volunteering for a month in Israel, specifically in the Golan Heights area, to temporarily replace men and women who were in the Israel Defense Forces and had been mobilized for the invasion of Lebanon. Their pitch interested me very much, and Trude gave her consent to my going, if they would have me. Specifically, they were looking for young people, 18 to 30 years old who could either do harvesting on the farms, or if found suitable, serve with the Border Patrol guarding the Syrian front.

I contacted their recruiting office in New York, and was turned down for being too old for that type of work. Since I very much wanted to go, I would not take this rejection as a final answer. After being turned down a second time, they finally agreed to meet with me, so that I could convince them that I could be of value to them, despite my age. I was asked to get a physical by my own doctor and was warned that if accepted, I would need another physical by an army doctor once I arrived in Israel. Based on my doctor's report, I was accepted and given discounted airline tickets to Israel. There were about 30 of us from the New York area, to be joined later by others from the Midwest and western US as well as from Europe. In total we were over one hundred "boys and girls". At age 55, I was more than twice the average age of the others.

We were met at the airport by a well-known colonel and founder of the Parachute Corps of the Israeli Army, who gave us a pep talk about the importance of what we were about to undertake. We were given the choice to either do agricultural work or military duty. The majority, including all of the few other “older” people (in their forties) chose agricultural work. I chose the military assignment, which depended upon my first passing the army doctor’s physical.

The next day I had a thorough physical examination lasting over two hours. I passed with flying colors, which I had never doubted. The doctor only cautioned me to remember my age, and that I was a volunteer, and that I did not necessarily have to feel that I must keep up with the youngsters. I thanked him for passing me and then and there made up my mind that whatever the others would be able to do, I would be able to do as well. I was able to accomplish at least 90% of what I had set out to do, only skipping very heavy physical activities, such as running uphill with a full field pack, helmet and rifle, etc.

In view of the fact that I had been in the US Army, I knew from which end of the rifle the bullet would come out, and was therefore allowed to help train the other volunteers in the handling of rifles, machineguns and hand grenades.

We were stationed initially in a tent camp near Chispin in the Golan Heights area. Another fellow and I were then assigned to a team of 6 Israeli soldiers, who lived in a cave dug into the side of a hill, which contained full living quarters for all of us. There were trenches dug into the other side of the hill facing the Syrian Army. It was in those trenches that we spent every waking hour, watching the Syrians and their troop movements for any aggressive intension. In fact, often we would watch them through huge binoculars, only to see them on the other side of the border, watching us with the same type of binoculars.

None of the Israeli soldiers spoke English. Neither of us spoke Hebrew. But we managed somehow to make ourselves understood, and learned to follow instructions. Toward the end of our stay there, the emergency that had been caused by the invasion into Lebanon was declared over, and we were able to assist the crew in dismantling the station, packing up rifles, machineguns, cases of hand grenades, binoculars, and kitchen gear.

Eating had been a little problematic in the beginning, since none of the Israeli soldiers were Orthodox and therefore were not concerned about the food being kosher. Although all food in the Israeli army is kosher, since meat and dairy were not kept separate upon arrival at our station, their pots, pans and dishes could not be used by us. Fortunately, they had a supply of new dishes still in the original packing, which we were able to use, taking out food from the original containers before the others helped themselves. From time to time, hot food would be delivered, and that would be the only time we could eat anything cooked. We ate piles and piles of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

On the last day of our stay in the Golan, the army gave us a wonderful goodbye party, with speeches, military band music and a parade of paratroopers. We returned to the US with happy and proud memories of having helped the people of Israel, which all are so dear to us.

RETIRED

After having worked at PB for 36 years, long hours during the week, often a full day on Sunday, or even a few hours on Saturday night if there had been a Jewish Holiday at the end of the previous week, I felt that Trude and I were entitled to a year off from all responsibilities. I include Trude, because it was also hard for her to have me gone all day, in addition to the days that I was far away on a business trip. So, 1986 became our year off. We traveled, we went shopping, we relaxed, and for the first time in my life I found myself with leisure hours and nothing to fill them with. And I did not like it. When the year neared its end, I started to plan for the future.

I knew that I wanted to continue working, although not necessarily at a job. During my year off I already had been contacted by both former business associates at PB, and others who wanted me to do consulting work for them in some of the areas in which I was known to have expertise. I started to seriously consider some of these proposals. After a few weeks I began to accept those that I thought would be interesting and challenging. The first one was from a former senior officer of PB who, after leaving PB, had, together with several others PB alumni, established his own business. Actually this particular consultancy had little to do with either traffic or marine insurance, but involved the financial supervision of an operation dealing in oil and oil products trading, located in Houston. It involved huge sums of money, hedging, record keeping, etc. Although I was not part of the operation itself, I had to make sure that everything was done as required by management. When management later decided to close down the business, the residual work consisted of various pending arbitrations, court cases and other contractual or legal issues. As it turned out, this, my first consultancy, also lasted the longest, ending only after the last settlement, in the year 2002.

For others clients, I handled several difficult marine insurance claims on complex liquid fuels which in some instances required me to travel to Europe to negotiate with European insurance companies. Several times, I was a consultant to attorneys who needed an expert witness in the field of marine insurance. I never did have to testify in court, with the cases being settled before they came to trial.

Another time, I was engaged to manage the moving of a large corporation office from New York to New Jersey, reporting directly to the Chairman of the Board. That certainly was far removed from either traffic or insurance, but it was interesting, different, and a challenge.

Over the years, less and less interesting proposals came to my attention and I started looking around for something else. I had turned down several offers of positions in related fields because I appreciated the freedom that consulting gave me.

During the time period that I was looking around for a new activity, the marketing of diet supplements was the talk on everyone's lips. The diet supplements came in powder form and had to be mixed with water in a shaker before being consumed, a real messy process, particularly if one was not in his or her own kitchen, but perhaps traveling. One diet-promoting company also offered to sell its customers a small battery-operated mixer, that they could use in any glass or cup.

I thought that was an idea to look into. I found out that a company in California was having the mixers manufactured in Hong Kong and was marketing them through very limited outlets. I contacted them and offered to become their marketing arm for all major chain stores. Although they did not know me, and I do not know whether they ever investigated me, they accepted my proposal with a percentage commission for me on all my sales. All expenses would be born by them, so that it was risk-free for me. Even rejects and returns would be their responsibility. They sent me a two-page agreement, whose terms were even broader than those that I had outlined for them, excluding only those stores that were already their customers.

I did most of my selling by cold-calling the purchasing agents for grocery and drug chains and sending them free samples. Eventually, I also added on pill boxes which were imported by the same people; but the little mixers continued to be my main commodity.

When after a few years the diet supplement manufacturers switched to liquid, replacing the powdered form, the mixer market died out. In the meantime, the people had started importing, and I had begun to distribute a small scale that could be used to weigh food portions or other lightweight things, such as mail. Over the years we moved tens of thousands of these items, but eventually the market dried up and I was able to sell my list of customers back to the importer.

VOLUNTEERING

All my life I have been involved with volunteer work in one form or another. It started as far back as 1947, after I was discharged from the army.

Some of my friends in Washington Heights who were a few years older, and had therefore been discharged before me, as well as several girls, had formed an organization and named it the Overseas Relief Committee. I joined the committee and later became its president. According to some papers I saw recently, the ORC was part of the Agudath Israel organization in Washington Heights, although I do not recall that affiliation. I do know that we kids worked on our own, without any outside direction or interference.

We raised funds by various means, solicited donations of food, clothing and shoes, had everything cleaned and repaired, and shipped to refugees in European DP camps. These Displaced Persons had been rescued from concentration camps, but lived in refugee camps while looking for loved ones, or for a way to make a living. Most had no income. We made individual packages for families whose names had been given to us by social workers in the camps. We packed in an empty room in the apartment of Harry and Marguerite Levi (their granddaughter, Meira would, many years later, marry our oldest grandson, Ari), and used Opa's truck to take the packages to the Post Office.

In the 1940's and 1950's, we kids all belonged to an Orthodox social group, Agudath Israel, that among other activities, had youth group meetings on Saturday afternoons. Every group had an older leader who was given material on some Jewish topic, to discuss with the group. For a number of years, I was one of the group leaders. I eventually outgrew that activity.

Opa had always been involved with an organization that had been founded by a number of Orthodox Jewish congregations in Washington Heights. The organization, called Gemiluth Chessed of Greater New York, supported people with temporary financial difficulties. Some years later, they raised a large sum of money and built a residential facility for senior citizens in Palisades, New York. Opa was involved with that activity as well, and eventually both Opa and Oma moved there. Opa had asked me to join the Board of Directors, which I did. I only remained on that board for a short while until I realized that all decisions had already been made before the board meetings, and the board was just a rubber stamp to make those decisions official. I was not comfortable with that arrangement and therefore resigned.

In the late 1950's, I was asked to join the Board of Directors of the American Committee for Shaare Zedek Hospital in Jerusalem Inc. This was a New York charitable corporation functioning as the fundraising arm of the hospital by that name in Jerusalem. The hospital had been established in Jerusalem in the 19th century, when the area was still under Turkish administration. It was at first a clinic helping the poor people of the city, receiving financial support from the Jewish communities in Amsterdam, Holland and Frankfurt, Germany but later established itself as a hospital with a large building in the heart of the city. Years later, the hospital moved to the outskirts of the city after building a large medical center under the direction of the medical director, Prof. David Meir, a dear and close friend until his untimely death in an automobile accident. Then and now, that hospital was and still remains the second largest medical center in Jerusalem and a lot of the credit for it goes to Prof. Meir.

When the American Committee was in its infancy, it was made up of local men and women, who would meet to discuss, for example, whether to send \$5000 or even \$6000 to Jerusalem that week. As the organization grew, and the needs of the hospital increased, well-known industrialists and businessmen were asked to join in order to broaden the reach of the organization. As a result, Ludwig Jesselson, Chairman of the Board of PB, Charles Bendheim, CEO of PB Chemicals, and Max Stern, Chairman of the Board of Hartz Mountain Food came to lead the organization. The New York office of SZ became the hospital's main financial support, and we were able to send millions of dollars to them each year.

I joined the board and in June 1960 and two years later became its Treasurer. I would remain in that capacity for over 30 years, being elected later also to the Board of Directors and to the Board of Governors of the hospital itself in Jerusalem. In 1990 we had a falling-out over a major policy difference and I resigned from all positions.

One story involving Prof. Meir bears repeating since it involves the political and religious outlook of certain groups of Orthodox Jews. In the mid 1960s, when SZMC was still housed in the old building on Jaffa Road in Jerusalem, the Executive Board of the hospital decided to engage Prof. Meir as the Director General of the hospital to take the organization into the twentieth century. David had been at that time a pathologist in New York, and although I was not involved in the selection process, obviously he must have shown the leadership qualities and medical knowledge necessary to impress the board. Certain political factions in Israel, to which Prof. Meir did not belong, were afraid that upon becoming Director General he would permit autopsies at the hospital that were prohibited by Jewish religious law. These people, both in

Israel as well as in the United States, tried their best over many months, by both legal as well illegal means, to influence the Executive Board members to change their minds and appoint someone more to their liking.

They used smear campaign ads in Jewish newspapers and magazines, handed out leaflets in many public buildings, and picketed the homes and offices of the members of the board. For some reason these people felt that I could influence Mr. Ludwig Jesselson, a member of the board, just because I worked for him at Philipp Brothers. The method they used with me was a series of phone calls, over a period of many weeks, usually at around 2 AM. It is always scary to be woken up by a phone ringing in the middle of the night, but this, at least initially, was much worse. They threatened to kill Trude and throw my children out of the window and other similar kind acts, if I did not influence Mr. Jesselson. Although Trude, throughout the entire episode remained very fearful and upset, once I realized who was behind those calls I relaxed. I could easily have changed my phone number, or unlisted it, but it would have been only be a matter of time before they found it out, particularly since I knew that a certain attorney in Washington Heights was involved with the group and was feeding them information as to our whereabouts and activities. It was also recommended to me to just take the phone off the hook at night, but then they would have called during the day.

I was not going to react to this attack on my family by hiding from the group. This was, and still is, not my style. I was going to fight back and I did. Estie, being a teenager in high school, had her own telephone line and number. I discussed the problem with the local police and they agreed to the following. The police gave me a direct telephone number to a detective sergeant at the local precinct and whenever we received a call on my line, I was going to wake up Estie (if she was not already awake) and have her call the sergeant on her line. The police would then notify the telephone company and they would start a tracer to try to locate the caller. My job was to keep the caller on the line for as long as possible to give the telephone company maximum tracing time. I kept them on the line, needling them, laughing at their threats, and making believe I was listening to their entreaties until they got tired. I once kept them on the phone for 58 minutes. Unfortunately in those years, phone switching between stations was done basically manually and at night the stations were not manned. Consequently, the phone company had to physically send someone from station to station to trace the calls, a very inefficient and time consuming project. As a result, the calls were never traced beyond the area code which identified the origin of the calls as Borough Park, New York.

When I got tired of listening to the childish but mean outpourings, I told the caller that I did not take his threats seriously since he would not have the guts to carry them out. When he protested, I offered to meet with him at a point and time of his choosing to give him the opportunity to show his guts. I told him what kind of head covering I would wear, and he said he would meet me at midnight (very dramatic) on a certain day at Marcy Avenue and Broadway in Brooklyn. I promptly notified the police, and although we were convinced that nobody would show, the police sent a Yiddish-speaking officer in civilian clothing and wearing my head covering to that corner at the appointed time. The officer stood around for almost an hour, but as expected noone showed and nothing happened. Once I realized that due to mechanical difficulties we would never be able to trace the caller, I decided to bring the annoyance to an end. I bought a special whistle (I think they have been outlawed in the meantime) that when blown into a telephone creates such a high pitched sound that it is extremely painful to the listener at the other end. The nightly call I received that night was therefore the last one ever.

Another event that took place at about the same time, orchestrated by the same fanatics, was

more public than their calls to me had been. The New York office of Shaare Zedek Hospital has always had an annual fundraising dinner at one of the major hotels in New York City. That year it was going to be at the New York Hilton with an expected attendance of some 800 to 900 supporters. We learned, I do not remember anymore how, that a group was organizing to bus hundreds of students to the hotel to picket and to disrupt the affair. The police were willing to cooperate, but by law they could not enter private property (the hotel) until or unless a crime was committed or at least threatened. I therefore formed a private "police" force made up of about ten young men to prevent any unauthorized persons from entering the banquet hall. To identify ourselves to the hotel security force as well as to the police, we wore identical lapel pins.

About an hour after the affair had started, we were told that about ten buses were discharging students in front of the hotel. We mobilized our "police" and stationed ourselves at the top of the escalator on the banquet floor. For a while the picketers remained on the sidewalk outside, handing out leaflets. Then one group of students after another entered the hotel and came up the escalator. As they reached our floor, they were "guided" from the up escalator onto the down escalator resulting in their ending up where they had started. A group of two fellows kept repeating this merry-go-round trying to get my attention in order to talk to me. I paid no attention to them as long as we had other students on the escalator. Finally I did ask them what they wanted. They said that they just wanted to look into the banquet hall and promised no trouble. I warned them that if they even touched the door they would find themselves in deep trouble. I took one at a time to the door, keeping a tight grip on them, opened the door for 30 seconds, and then got them back on the down escalator. After a couple of hours the picketers went home.

A few years later I would pick up volunteering again, but this time as a full-time occupation.

PARALEGAL

Throughout my business life I had dealt with lawyers at PB, and had always found their profession to be very interesting. One of my responsibilities at PB as General Traffic Manager was to check all contracts issued in the New York office for compliance with legal and corporate requirements.

Sometime in the 1950's, PB was assessed a heavy import duty on a new product that we had imported, because the US Customs could not find the item listed in the Import Duty Tariff. It was up to us to demonstrate that they were wrong in their assessment. Since it was one of the commodities for which I was responsible, it was left for me to handle. I spent hours researching in the public and legal libraries and then presented my findings to the company lawyers. They liked what they read and told me to pursue it. I wrote up a brief as best as I could and submitted it to Washington. My argument was on the fact that since this commodity (an artificially produced

Columbite Concentrate) did not exist in 1933 when Congress wrote the present act, Congress could not have had this product in mind at the time. Consequently, the item had to be classified under a different heading which would allow duty free entry into the US.

I was notified to come to a hearing at the Department of Treasury in Washington, in the presence of representatives from the Departments of State and Commerce, as well as from the Norwegian Embassy (Norway being the country of origin). Naturally all the representatives, or at least most of them, I guessed, were attorneys. I represented PB. I presented my case, a few questions were asked, and the Treasury representative accepted my argument. I think everyone was happy with the outcome. Going down in the elevator, one of the Treasury attorneys paid me a huge compliment. He asked me which law school I had attended. I could have flown home without a plane.

I knew that at my age I would never go to law school, but I did want to do something along that line. I decided that I would take a paralegal course at Farleigh Dickenson University in Teaneck New Jersey. I found the course extremely interesting, except for the computer section which involved mostly theory and little practice.

After receiving my certificate in March 1992, I started to investigate the job opportunities for a paralegal. The positive side was that it I would be working in the legal field, but the negative side was too overpowering. Aside from the fact that it meant returning to the responsibilities (and constraints) of a job, investigation and conversations with working paralegals showed me that the work consisted of that which the lawyers did not want to do, could not involve direct client contact, and it was mostly routine. And the pay was lousy.

To test the waters I accepted a position as an extern in the Professional Department of the New Jersey Attorney General's office in Newark. Not only did the position not pay anything, but I had to pay for my own transportation, parking, and meals. After one year of often sitting around for hours with nothing to do, interspersed with some quite interesting work, I decided that this was not something I wanted to pursue. I left in January 1993.

After giving the matter much thought, I decided that really what I wanted to do after all these years of working for money, was to pay back some of what I felt my family owed to society. The United States had given me a new home; I had a wonderful and healthy growing family. More I did not need. It was payback time.

Working for free in Newark was not attractive, not only because of the distance, but the location was not the most comfortable place to be after dark in the winter. If I worked for free, at least I should not have to incur significant transportation and food costs. I started looking around in my own neighborhood.

HOSPITAL VOLUNTEER AT HUMC

Esther's husband, Harold was the Director of Neonatology at Hackensack University Medical Center. He told me that one of the departments involved in research of the demographics of the patient population, had a project to do for which they had no staff. As a volunteer I would be able to do the work for them. I accepted the suggestion and registered at HUMC as a volunteer. At the same time, namely in early 1993, I contacted the President of Englewood Hospital and Medical Center about the idea of working as a part time Volunteer there as well, so that I could decide which I would prefer.

At HUMC, I was put to work in the department that Harold had mentioned to me. I worked on various miscellaneous projects while having the demographics project laid out for me. I was told that much of the information that I would need in order to establish the statistics, was available in their own library and I would have to sit there and extract the facts and record them. Since I always look to get a job done as quickly and as efficiently as possible, meaning not necessarily doing it the way I had been told to do it, I started doing some research on the subject by telephone. I was just not looking forward to sitting in the library for months on end and was hoping that an easier way to accomplish the same goal could be found. It was no wonder that the department had not been able to find anyone to work on that project.

Indeed, my inquiries were fruitful and I found out that what I was to work on was not so unique, and, in fact, the statistics were already available on tape from a company whose business it to collect these types of statistics and selling them to those interested. The only problem was that the tape had to be purchased, whereas I worked for free. When I presented my supervisor with these facts, I thought that she would be overjoyed with my discovery, but the exact opposite was true. I was told in no uncertain terms to forget about it, since the cost of the tape was not in the budget. Now I know that all hospitals operate on tight budgets and therefore the response was not surprising to me. Nevertheless, it seemed to me that if the hospital really would benefit from acquiring those statistics, a source of funding should be found. My supervisor was not interested in discussing the matter any further. I, thereupon, offered to buy the tapes for the hospital, as a charitable donation. My supervisor brushed off my second suggestion with the statement that HUMC needed donations more urgently for the Children's Cancer Center. I did not understand then, and I still do not understand now, how declining my donation would increase donations somewhere else. I tried to solicit an explanation, but it was not forthcoming. When I told her that I was not willing to sit in the library for months, when the information was already available elsewhere, she replied that she had no other work for me. That ended my work as a volunteer at HUMC.

HOSPITAL VOLUNTEER AT EHMC

I had already started working on a part-time basis at EHMC while Mr. Elliot Brooks, the Senior Vice President for Human Resources, looked for a permanent assignment for me. Upon leaving HUMC, I told Mr. Brooks that I was now interested in a full-time volunteer position instead of a part-time one. The problem was that, by far, the majority of volunteers worked for anywhere from only a few hours a week to a few days a week. Full time volunteer jobs were just not a part of the organizational structure. I was interviewed by several departments, but none of them had enough work for a volunteer on a full-time basis.

Finally, when he ran out of ideas about where to send me, Mr. Brooks said that maybe I could be of use right there, in Human Resources. A similar statement had been made to me by Mr. Siegfried Ullmann to Mr. Salomon Fischmann, when I was interviewed for a job at Phillip Brothers. Once hired there, I worked there for 36 years. Now Mr. Brooks was putting me to work in Human Resources, and as of the writing of these lines, I have only a little less than 12 years under my belt, on the way to 36 again. At the age of 101 I don't know whether anyone would still want me around.

A few words about Mr. Brooks and the staff of the Human Resources Department. I found the attitude toward me to be unbelievably different when comparing HUMC and EHMC. I am now referring to the beginning of each of my relationships with both institutions. Naturally I do not want to generalize, but rather to limit my comments to those related to the few individuals with whom I came into contact. At HUMC I was a worker whose hands were to be utilized, but whose brain was to be deposited at the entrance door. They wanted to hear no comments or suggestions from me, and I either did what I was told following their instructions, or they had no use for me. When I asked for an explanation, not only was none forthcoming, but their tone and attitude toward me was totally unacceptable.

At EHMC on the other hand, right from the beginning, I was treated with courtesy and understanding, and those who interviewed me in the various departments were apologetic that they had no opening for me. I never expected to be treated as an equal, since after all, a volunteer is a worker here today and maybe gone tomorrow; and maybe he comes back the following week or month, or maybe only after the summer is over. An employee has responsibilities toward his employer that go far beyond the responsibilities of a volunteer toward those to whom he reports. I have stated many times that therefore, I wanted to be considered an "unpaid employee" rather than a volunteer.

Right from the beginning, Mr. Brooks made me feel at home in Human Resources and, as time went on and I developed relationships with others in the department, I became part of the "club" of co-worker friends. Never did anyone make me feel that "he is only a volunteer", even if I sometimes joked about it.

Why is everyone being treated at EHMC as if they were on the same level on the Table of Organization? What is the source of this approach?

The source is at the senior management level, senior management in the department, and senior management at the top levels of the organization. Consider Mr. Kane, who, over the years before

he left, would not miss a single opportunity to come over to me in the cafeteria to wish me a Happy New Year before the Jewish Holidays. And it was Mr. Kane, and certainly now also Mr. Duchak, who would eat in the cafeteria, and not be concerned about who was sitting on his right or left or across from him. VP, RN, clerk, maintenance crew, linen worker, or volunteer, everyone was part of the conversation. And not only the President, but all the other officers of the hospital, were “infected” by that same wonderful and healthy attitude toward one another. And in Human Resources, there was Mr. Brooks to lead by example and the rest of the crew, managers and clerks alike, followed.

Even now, after nearly 12 years and almost 16,000 hours of volunteering, we are all one big happy gang. We eat together, we laugh together, and we work together as equals. In almost 55 years of working in various capacities and at various levels of responsibility, I have never felt as comfortable as I do in that office.

Yes, I have had complaints, but mostly they concern a lack of sufficient work for me. And I will continue to complain about that. And yes, I have annoyed others and no doubt upset them when I ask too many questions, or have suggestions as to how something should or should not be done. But the responses have always been courteous and have been given in a constructive manner, and not as a brush-off.

I sincerely hope that the Almighty will preserve my health and give me the mental and physical strength to continue with this wonderful gang, for as long as they will have me.

FAMILY

At the time of this writing, Trude and I have been married for over 53 years. They have been happy and fruitful years generally, but also fraught with many difficulties and much pain along the way.

Despite the wonderful times we enjoyed, illness and the death of loved ones were a constant presence in our lives. As mentioned above, Trude’s mother passed away in 1947, when Trude was only 19 years old. Trude’s father passed away just a few months after our wedding.

During the first 20 years of our marriage, Trude was often in the hospital, sometimes two or three times a year, including some long stays of eight or nine weeks. During one such stay in the hospital, Trude’s sister, Helen, passed away. Helen had been like a mother to Trude for all these years, having also taken our children to her home in Providence on many occasions.

We had been married only a few years when Trude’s aunt, Mrs. Hassenfeld, passed away. Mrs. Hassenfeld had been more than just an aunt to Trude after Trude lost her own mother in the 1940’s. Shortly thereafter Mr. Hassenfeld, her husband, passed away, and then their daughter.

Trude's oldest sister and brother, who had been quite a bit older than Trude passed away years earlier. Trude's younger brother, Ira, more recently known as Yisrael after he married and settled in Israel, died three years ago after a brief illness, and the last of her siblings, Edith, passed away just a few months ago.

In 1994, our daughter Esther was diagnosed with cancer, but following a year of treatment, thank G-d, made a full recovery.

When I became ill, first with a problem brought on by a heart medication that I was taking, and then when I needed quadruple bypass surgery, Trude stood by my side and nursed me back to health.

Trude had never been happy in Washington Heights, as a result of having grown up in different surroundings and with different friends, and also that she felt everyone was looking down at her since she did not come from a German background. Although over the years I had gotten used to the snobby ness and discriminations on the part of the community, the time came when we both felt we had had enough and wanted to move away. We looked at homes in Queens and Long Island, but finally settled on Englewood, New Jersey as it seemed to have all the advantages of suburban living (meaning, being away from Washington Heights) while still being near enough to the city, since my parents were still living there.

We bought a beautiful split-level at 400 Gloucester St. in the East Hill section, in 1976, on a third of an acre with a brook running through the beautifully landscaped back yard, and only a few blocks from a nature preserve, allowing us the periodic visits by wild turkeys and deer. For many years after leaving Washington Heights, when meeting its residents, I would be asked whether I did not miss it. I had a standard reply. The only thing I miss, is not having moved sooner. It was not the answer that was expected.

Although we were happy there, the location was a bit far from the synagogue for my parents to walk to on Shabbos when they stayed with us for a weekend. To make it easier for them we bought another house within one long block of the synagogue in 1986 at 230 Fountain Ave. but could not find a buyer for our first house until 1987 because of a continuing slowdown in the real estate market. By then my parents had decided to leave Washington Heights and had moved to the Palisades Gardens Home for Senior Citizens in Palisades, New York. We are still living in that house at the time of this writing, and although we would prefer something smaller (this house has ten rooms) we have not yet been able to find something that suits us.

Oma passed away in 1990, at the ripe old age of 89, never having suffered any serious illness, and having shown superhuman strength and steadfastness during her most difficult years in the 1940s and 1950s. Opa followed Oma in 1993, after a brief illness, also without having had any serious illness during his lifetime. He had had a cardiac pacemaker inserted many years earlier. He was 97 years old when he passed away.

Even after he had retired and had sold his business, Opa remained active in various charitable causes in his community. When in the 1980s both Oma and Opa moved to the Palisades Gardens Home for Senior Citizens, for which Opa had worked in various capacities since even before its establishment, he continued to function as the supervisor of its synagogue and as the chairman of

its *kashruth* committee. He had been the head of the Strauss family since coming to the US, revered and honored by all whose lives he touched. He was honored for his volunteer work by several institutions. Rav Breuer, with whom Opa consulted often, and to whom he looked up as his religious mentor, gave Opa the honorary title of *Chaver*, which was permanently added to his Hebrew name.

Opa had given instructions that after his passing he wished the burial procession to pass by the Breuer synagogue and YRSRH School in Washington Heights on its way to the cemetery. We honored his request and upon arrival in front of the school, the entire student body poured out onto the steps and landings to pay their respects to a man who had given every ounce of his body and soul to their community.

The most terrible tragedy of our lives occurred in April of this year, 2004, with the loss of our son Benjy in the prime of his life, at the age of 50. He passed away after a two week illness leaving his wife, Claire, and four wonderful children without a husband and father. Benjy was, and still is in our hearts, the most warm, caring and considerate person that one could imagine. Not only was he so to his wonderful wife, Claire, and children, not only to his parents and grandparents, but also to others not in his immediate family. Benjy was a great public speaker, particularly when he spoke about a member of his immediate family who was being honored. The audience to whom he spoke could always feel that every word, every expression came from deep within his heart. His loss will always remain in the forefront of our minds and hearts. Time has not, thus far, healed the pain.

Our daughter, Esther is married to a brilliant physician who is the Director of Neonatology at Hackensack University Medical Center. Esther is an active physical therapist, working with disabled children in the Bergen County school system. They gave us four wonderful grandchildren, three of whom are married and the fourth is a freshman at NYU.

I cannot get started writing about our grandchildren or even the eight great-grandchildren they have given us (so far), without filling up pages and pages. Let that be the subject on a different occasion. Let it suffice to say, that some of their accomplishments never cease to amaze even the unknowing and unrelated bystander.

Our son, Benjamin, before his untimely sudden death, was a trader in Financial Futures a very difficult and time-demanding career. He had also worked as a trader at Philipp Brothers for a number of years while I was still there. He married the beautiful Claire Lang, who also happened to be a niece to Mr. Jesselson of Philipp Brothers. They also have four wonderful children with two still in college, the oldest in medical school, and the youngest a senior in high school. I love to spend time with all of them, and I always look forward to an invitation to stay at their house over Shabbos. Claire, for many years has run a very popular playgroup in her house. The children are just crazy about her, and I can understand why.

One day I will write about my grandchildren and great grandchildren. But I am afraid no one outside of family will want to read it. Everybody will comment, "Well what do you expect a grandfather to say about his grandchildren." So I will wait a while, until they have made their mark in the world, and then I will be able to say, "You see, I told you so."

MY HEALTH

I had always been in generally good health, but, no doubt, I must have had all the childhood illnesses. Except for a bout of pneumonia in 1945 while in the army, I did not have any serious problems until the late 1980's.

In September 1988 I was diagnosed with coronary artery disease as shown by a thallium stress test and an angiogram and I was prescribed the statin mevacor.

I had my first Angioplasty in October 1988 and the second one in April 1989.

Sometime in mid-1989 I experienced new symptoms - pain and extreme weakness in my legs. I had difficulty walking more than a block or climbing more than one flight of stairs without having to stop. The doctors put me through every type of test, trying to determine the cause, but without success. Mevacor was suspected, but ruled out since my blood tests results did not show any muscular deterioration. When I was taken off mevacor for a few weeks, the symptoms persisted but my LDL and triglycerides shot up and my HDL dropped.

I was able to get an appointment at Mayo Clinic in September, stayed there for four days, and after going through another battery of tests, went home no wiser than before. Since my condition did not improve, Mayo Clinic had me come back a second time for a four-day stay, in November 1989. The results were the same, no clue. They suspected myasthenia gravis, but all tests results were normal.

Between the first and second visits to Mayo, Trude and I had went to Israel for the Sukkoth holidays, but I felt so bad that we came home after a few days. I did have the opportunity while there, to see a Dr. Fink, who had previously been the Deputy Director of Shaare Zedek Hospital and was at that time the Director of the Hospice at Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem. I took all my medical records with me and he spent over two hours going over them in his home. He concluded that it must be the mevacor, and suggested that I go off the medication for at least 3-4 weeks to allow my body to get rid of all residuals. I discontinued mevacor in mid-October, but it was not until after I had returned from my second visit to Mayo that I noticed in early December that I was feeling almost symptom-free.

I immediately reported the good news to both Dr. Fink and to Mayo Clinic (Dr. Fink's son, also an MD, would years later, work at Englewood Hospital for a number of years). I informed them that in order to prove that indeed mevacor was the cause, and not a coincidence, I was going to go back on the medication and see whether the symptoms would come back. Both parties strongly advised me against this action, since there was no guarantee that the second time around the symptoms would again disappear. Mayo Clinic also asked me to write up a complete medical history of my case, since they felt obligated to submit it to the FDA. I decided to ignore their advice. I felt, that for the sake of other patients who might have the same problem in the future, this information should be confirmed.

It was not until early March 1990, when I was convinced that same symptoms were back in full force, that I stopped the mevacor, and I was prescribed non-statins to keep my cholesterol under control.

I was fine until late 1998, when I developed angina once again. A stress test and angioplasty with a stent followed in December. A second angioplasty with a stent followed in February 1999.

Within a few months the angina was back, and it was decided that bypass surgery was the only answer. My cardiologist at the time recommended that I have the surgery performed by one of the foremost cardiac surgeons, Dr. Subramanian at Lenox Hill Hospital. He was at that time one of the few highly skilled cardiac surgeons performing “off-pump” surgery. There are numerous advantages in “off-pump” surgery as compared to conventional surgery during which the blood is circulated through a pump outside the body. I had four arteries replaced, by taking three (spare) arteries from my abdominal cavity, and one from my left forearm.

In early September, 2003 my cardiologist determined that my heartbeat was too slow for my active life, and, as a result, within a few days I was hospitalized and had a cardiac pacemaker inserted into my chest.

In the middle of the same month, from the results of a chemical stress test, it was determined that another two arteries were blocked. I was supposed to have both arteries fixed with a chemical stent at the same time, but due to a shortage of chemical stents at that particular time, the hospital had the correct size for only one of the arteries. Consequently, I had one artery opened then, and returned to the hospital a week later, to have the second one opened as well.

At this writing, I am feeling fine and I hope all cardiac problems are behind me.

THE BECKELD FAMILY

Lest the reader think, that I have related only that which was rosy in my life, and left untold the disappointments that are always part of life, let me conclude “My Stories” with a tale of a great disappointment. I agonized a long time over whether to tell it at all here, having never told it to anyone before. My family was aware of it, as it unfolded, and it was discussed here and there, and I have sought advice from others. I hesitated to write it down, because I do not want the reader to feel that I am bragging about it. But as Esther said, anybody who doesn’t know me yet from all the previous pages, is not going to form an opinion of me just from this last section.

In August 1993, Trude and I went on a group tour through Scandinavia, guided by Chana Scharfstein, a very Orthodox woman, originally from Sweden. We spent two weeks in Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland.

On the Shabbos that we spent in Stockholm, during the morning prayer service in the synagogue, I happened to notice a young boy of about 13, struggling first with the *Siddur* (Prayerbook), and then with the *Chumash* (Torah reading). It was obvious to me that he wanted to follow the service, but had great difficulty in finding the right page and then keeping up with the congregation. Since he was sitting directly in front of me, I leaned forward and helped him a number of times. Each time I was rewarded with a grateful and sincere smile. Since he was sitting alone, without any family next to him, I wanted to speak to him after the services. Intuition told me that there was something unusual there. Unfortunately, he was quicker than I, and he was gone before I had a chance to start a conversation.

Since Chana Scharfstein knew “everybody” in Scandinavia, I told her what had occurred and she immediately knew who the boy was. Since we were leaving on the following day, there was no further opportunity to meet, but Chana, who knew the mother, promised to call her and tell her about my interest.

Shortly after our return to the US, I received a fax from the mother, Simonne Beckheld, telling me about her family. She was at that time a single mother, with an almost 18 year old son, Baltsar, and a 13 year old son, Benedict who wanted to become a writer/journalist with a side line of *ba'al tefilah* or *ba'al kore* (reader during Jewish services). She herself was employed by the Jewish congregation in Stockholm and was also teaching Judaism and was giving Bar/Bas Mitzvah instructions. She stated that she had come from a completely assimilated (Jewish?) family of German origin, and only during her adult years had developed a very strong commitment to the Jewish faith and tradition. Although Simmone never talked about who her husband was, and I did not think it was any of my business to question her, we were subsequently told (probably by Chana Scharfstein) that her husband, from whom she was divorced, was Catholic and took no interest in the boys.

A lengthy correspondence developed over a period of several months, with the result that, following my invitation, Benedict became very much interested in coming to the US to continue his schooling, but not by himself. That suited me fine, because I did not want the responsibility for taking a 13 year old away from his family. I had seen the results of such separations during the war years in my own family, and I did not want to repeat with some else.

For the family to come to the US was a question of finances. Over a period of a few months, everything fell into place. Simonne obtained financing from the Swedish government to continue her studies in Judaism in the US, and Baltsar received a college scholarship to study in the US. Benedict, being too young for any Swedish financing, was taken care of by my offer to pay for all of his highschool, dorm and living expenses as long as he was in the US, and as long as he would go to a school that met my approval.

Unfortunately my inquiries of both the Moriah and Frisch schools in Bergen county were met with negative replies. There is no point in going into the details as to the underlying reasons.

In February 1994, Simonne and Benedict came for a visit to New York to try to finalize everything for their move. Simonne gave the impression of being a very sincere, Orthodox and dedicated woman, and Benedict as a very shy boy, very much interested in learning and improving himself in his commitment to Orthodox Judaism.

In May 1994, Benedict went to Israel on a field trip from his school in Sweden, and he seemed to

love it there, judging from the letters he wrote to us. In one of the letters he wrote,

“To go to the *kotel* [western wall] was one of the most incredible moments of my life. It was really amazing. I felt really close to Judaism, which I also do now, but I, in some way, felt my roots.”

Since there was no possibility for Benedict to be admitted to a local school in New Jersey, which I would have preferred, an application was filed for admission into the Yeshiva University High School for Boys in New York. In the meantime, Baltsar was admitted to Yeshiva University and Simonne graduated from Uppsala University (Sweden) with a degree equivalent to a BA and also was granted a scholarship for studies in the US from a Swedish foundation. In August 1994 Benedict was admitted into YUHSB as a member of the class of 1998.

In late August 1994, the family arrived in the US, and Benedict immediately started school. Although he had a shaky start for the first few months, he settled down, and did very well in most subjects. He was able to obtain a small scholarship from YU, and I paid for the balance of tuition, dorm, as well as all other school related expenses.

Everything seemed to be going well for several years, but in 1996 the first signs appeared that Benedict had gotten under the influence of a group of students in YUHSB who were anti-everything religious. I tried to get through to Benedict but without success. He continued to be courteous and friendly, went with me to a seminar at Aish Hatorah in New York, but seemed to be detached from everything Jewish. I also arranged for Benedict to visit with Dr. Yitzhak Block of the Friends of Lubavitch in London, Ontario. Dr. Block, a professor of philosophy was recommended to me as having vast experience in dealing with the problems Benedict was facing. He also had no success. I tried to convince Benedict to continue his schooling in Israel, in order to remove him from the bad influence, and although he initially showed interest, I think it was only to please me.

In August 1998, I received a letter from Benedict expressing regret for not going to Israel, and stating that he must follow his own heart and pursue the fields of study “that matter so much to me.” He thanked me for everything I had done for him and for his family, and hoped that I would not be angry with him, but that we would remain friends “whether I ever return to the Jewish path or not.”

I subsequently learned from Simonne that he had enrolled at Queens College (where his brother had also gone after leaving YU) and that his brother had also strongly influenced him away from Judaism. Since Queens College, for obvious reasons, was not acceptable to me, I discontinued all financial support once Benedict graduated from YUHSB.

Simonne received her green card, obtained a good job, and somehow has been able to support her family. Benedict has left the Jewish Faith completely and said that he does not believe in G-d. He studied philosophy and journalism.

Although we have talked to each other several times, I have no regular contact with the family anymore. I did receive a beautiful letter from Simonne in September 2000, thanking me for what I had done for her family.

Obviously the disappointment was great. A young and enthusiastic boy with so much potential had thrown everything away and had gone in the opposite direction. Do I have regrets for what I

did? Absolutely not, and I told that to Simonne. Would I have done it, had I known the outcome? Yes, certainly. In Sweden there was no opportunity to learn to become an Orthodox Jew; in fact the Orthodox community was shrinking. At least Benedict had the chance to learn for a few years the meaning of being an observant Jew. Falling by the wayside does not negate that. The Almighty has given the human being the ability to make choices, for good or for bad. But in order to make a choice he must have the knowledge. In Sweden, Benedict had no means by which to make a choice; he lacked the exposure to Orthodox Jewish life. With his schooling here he acquired that knowledge, but he made the wrong choice.

May G-d grant my wish that Benedict mature with time, reconsider his choice, and rejoin the ranks of observant Jews. I stand ready to receive him with open arms.

EPILOGUE

My problem with writing an epilogue is, that I don't know what an epilogue is. It just seemed to be an interesting sounding word found in my old Random House Dictionary. I didn't like the sound of *after*-word. I looked at a few books to see what other "authors" had used as the titles of their closing comments.

Ken Follett, in On Wings of Eagles, actually uses the word Epilogue, but he only uses it to describe what eventually happened to his characters. That was not what I had in mind. (By the way it was the story in this book that had given me the idea to lease a helicopter to rescue Benjy when he had been under house arrest in Bolivia)

Irving Stone, in The Agony and the Ecstasy uses the very descriptive word "Note" for the title of his closing, in which he lists his acknowledgments, debts, and expressions of gratitude. Well, I have done that already.

So, I just have to do my own thing.

There are really two points that I want to make in these final words.

The first an apology. I apologize for having been too wordy when telling my stories, which is something of which Trude has often accused me. And she is, no doubt, correct. To me, some of the occurrences, such as our escape from Germany, my stay in Korea with the army, my many years at PB, my boy/man story, are so amazing, that I don't see how I could spare the reader the details. Although a well-mannered listener is not going to walk away while I am talking, stifle a yawn, or check his watch to see whether it has stopped, the reader is free to hop, skip and jump, and tell me how fascinating he found every word. I'll never know the difference.

The second point I wanted to make is regarding the factual accuracy of what I have written. I have tried my best to tell the stories as I actually remember them, but memory can play tricks on a person. What seems to me now an undisputed fact, might have developed over the years to fit into my general outline. I hope that this is not the case, but I seriously invite any reader to bring any obvious, as well as not so obvious, errors to my attention. I have tried to only relate that which I can document in one form or another, or where other participant are available to confirm or deny the facts. As a result, I decided not relate one or two additional short stories since they do not measure up to this standard.

If, after trying my best to stick to the facts, I nevertheless have failed here or there - *mea culpa - chotosi* - forgive me.

And finally it was my grandson Gil Perl, one of my proof readers who suggested an addition to this epilogue. Not only did he do a thorough job of proof reading, but he also reminded me of a

number of other vignettes, that he remembered having heard from me over the years, that I might add to fill in some gaps. Gil also suggested that I comment on anything from my life that I would redo or a decision I would change if I were given the chance. It was a very pointed question and one that I had thought about for years, but I had never had the guts to expose from my innermost self. I would think about it whenever certain comments were made to me by either a member of my family, or by an intimate acquaintance. And when Gil made the suggestion now, I decided this would be the opportunity to do so, since, after all, I have now practically laid myself bare before the reader anyhow with the stories of my life, the good and the bad, the happy and the sad.

I am sure in hindsight there are other decisions that I would have made differently over the years, but there are two that are foremost in my mind and that I have eluded to above.

Having experienced the trials and tribulations of advanced age over in the last few years, I would have treated my parents with more feeling and understanding. Their last years were physically very difficult for them although, not due to any specific sickness, but rather due to normal deterioration of advanced age. Regretfully, I did not have the sufficient experience then to recognize that although I was doing what I thought was the best, it was not the best for them. One honors one's parents by treating them the way *they* want to be treated, not the way *we* think they ought to be treated. I regret that the opportunity to honor them is past, all I can do is to honor their memory.

The other action that I would have done differently is my relationship that we had with our children. Were I the opportunity to live my life over again, that would be the most important change. During their formative years I was too occupied with everything else other than spending enough time with Estie and Benjy. I was busy trying to take care of Trude during her illnesses and repeated surgeries, busy working long hours at Philipp Brothers, busy spending numerous hours each week volunteering for Shaare Zedek Hospital, busy trying to relax while working on my hobby of stamp collecting, and always too busy to spend more time with our children. The fact that they both turned out the way they did, thanks to *Hashem*, is not because of us, but despite us. Learning from my children when they had their own families finally taught me how I should have acted 40 years earlier. Excuses and explanations I have by the bushel, but the facts do not change. I thank G-d that despite the lack of attention they experienced during their own youth they were able, together with their spouses, to improve upon their parents' shortcomings.

And finally I thank *Hashem* for giving me the full life I have led, the loving family that He was gracious enough to give me, and the adequate means with which to help those in need.

